

A STUDY OF ROMANS 13:1-7

With Emphasis on Historical Setting, Discourse Analysis, and Grammatical Exegesis

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For the Frost Valley Conference of the North Atlantic District of WELS, January 19, 2015

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Romans 13:1-7, NIV¹

Scholars at times have argued that Romans 13:1-7 is “the most historically influential paragraph Paul ever wrote.” ² And from a human perspective, we can understand the sentiment. Since the global spread of Christianity, few texts from the Bible have more directly effected Christian action towards emperors, senates, monarchies, dictatorships, democracies, rebellions, just wars, unjust wars, civil wars, violent resistances and nonviolent resistances in the Western world. And yet, as the New Testament scholar Douglas Moo puts it, “It is only a slight

¹ All Scripture quotes taken from the New International Version, British Version.

² Robert Morgan, *Romans* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 134, 135.

exaggeration to say that the history of the interpretation of Rom. 13:1-7 is the history of attempts to avoid what seems to be its plain meaning.”³ Nothing rubs the classical and democratic sentiments of the West more than being told to submit to civil authorities *whether or not they act morally*.

As both Lutherans and citizens of human rights-based democracies, we struggle as well with the desire to put human-constructed propositions that sound theological (for example, “All men... are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness... Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it”) above biblical propositions (for example, “There is no authority except that which God has established”).

Before Christians can act, Christians ought to strive to understand God’s word clearly. It’s my hope this paper helps us do that, think more clearly. The Lutheran exegete at times walks a middle road, upholding on the one hand that Scripture is to be taken as it plainly says, and upholding on the other that sound exegesis involves a painstaking historical grammatical approach. Hopefully the reader will walk away not learning anything new, since Scripture speaks plainly, and yet something new, since an analysis of history and grammar helps shed light on that plain meaning.

Understanding the historical context is essential for proper exegesis, especially for understanding texts such as Romans 13 rich with contextual meaning and purpose. As Kuske writes in his *Biblical Interpretation*, “To study the historical setting and understand the words of Scripture in the light of this background is basic for the proper understanding of many biblical passages.”⁴ We will discover just how true Kuske’s words are. My desired contribution to the exegetical study of Romans 13:1-7 is to provide a clear understanding of the historical context within which Paul wrote Romans, so that we might understand Paul and his audience better, and so know God’s Word better.

After a thorough introduction to the historical setting of Romans 13, we will consider Romans 13 in light of its Biblical context: first the Epistle to the Romans, and second Scripture in general. After becoming well acquainted with the horizon Romans 13 rests upon, we finally turn to the Greek text. Here we will outline the text and then stress four main themes: the universal ethical law (and its seeming exceptions) that **Christians ought to submit to earthly authorities**, its premise that **there is no authority except that which God has established**, the proverbial maxim (and its exceptions) that **those who rebel against the government bring earthly judgment on themselves**, and the very practical application that **for these reasons, Christians ought to pay taxes**. Following the main text you will find more specific exegetical notes.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 806.

⁴ David P. Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), 63-64, 67.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Paul and His Audience.

Paul writes his epistle to the Christians in Rome during his third missionary journey from Corinth, after his writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians in 57 A.D. F. F. Bruce places the writing of Romans in 57 as well.⁵ This is before Paul's first Roman imprisonment in 61 or 62. Note that one of the more recent events recorded in Acts of note for Paul had been the uproar in Ephesus where violence almost ensued except for the warnings of an Ephesian city clerk who quieted the mob with threats of legal action from the authorities. (Acts 19) As we reflect on Paul's attitudes towards the government, we might conclude with Talbert that Paul's "limited homage is far from an enthusiastic endorsement of the empire."⁶ And yet we certainly find plenty of events for Paul to draw on to give thanks for Rome's effective policing of so vast an empire.

Christianity's rise in Rome remains rather mysterious. Visitors from Rome were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10), and some may have returned to Rome with the Christian faith. In 49 Jews are expelled from Rome due to rioting in the name of one Chrestus, Seutonius reports.⁷ Many scholars see this as most likely a reference to Jesus Christ. If there was debate and conflict within the Roman Jewish community over Jesus, Priscilla and Aquila appear to be Jewish Christians among those expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2). And so it is very possible there are Christians in Rome within the first two decades after Jesus' resurrection.

When Paul first arrives in Rome, the Jewish community that comes out to him regards the Christian "sect" with suspicion (Acts 28:22), and so we might conclude that not many Jews in Rome had yet become Christians, or even had much accurate information about Christianity. Although Paul seems to believe there is interaction between Roman Jews and his letter's audience (Rom 15:7ff), at the beginning of his letter to the Roman Christians, he refers to the congregation as part of those from the nations *called* to belong to Christ, which may be an acknowledgment of their largely Gentile status (Rom 1:5,6,13). Paul also refers to the Roman Christians as those grafted in to the family of God, referring to Jewish groups as others (Rom 11:17-36).

We can safely conclude that Paul is writing to an extremely young congregation, possibly without the familiarity of the Old Testament that a strong Jewish community would provide. (Although we note that some knowledge of LXX seems required for Rom 9-11.) Although commended for their witnessing of Christ because of their faith (Rom 1:8), Paul sees it necessary to write to them one of the most brilliant primers on the foundation of Christian doctrine, as well as necessary to provide insight on Christian living, including among non-Christian authorities.

Concerning the social status of these early Christians in Rome, we might be able to identify five "house churches" or separate gatherings of Christians in Romans 16. "This means that there had to have been some early Christians in Rome of significant enough social status to

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 475.

⁶ C. Talbert, *Romans* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002), 296.

⁷ Bruce, 381.

have more than just a room in an *insula* (in modern terms, an apartment house.)”⁸ Wealth, though, would not be a sign of social status, since more than the social elite could obtain wealth. And of these house churches, there is no evidence for or against a centralized organization at the time Paul writes his epistle to Rome.

The Treatment of Christians in Rome

Knowing the atrocities Christians will face in the early church starting under the rule of Nero and climaxing in the early 4th century, it is tempting to draw the conclusion that Christians in Rome at the time of Paul’s Epistle were in tune with how terrible it could be for Christians to endure Roman rule. Henry Eyster Jacobs’ commentary, for example, places stress on the cruelty and injustice of the Roman government.⁹ What we will find, interestingly, is that, apart from the intrigue of politics within the Roman dynasties, Roman Christians at this time lived relatively peaceful civil lives.

Christian persecution in general has been helpfully distinguished by Geoffrey de Ste. Croix as three phases. Phase 1 runs up to the beginning of the Neronian persecution in 64.¹⁰ Danny Praet comments, “The violence Christians experienced in this first phase was seen as an internal Jewish problem, and must have been in accordance with the very small numbers of Christians in these first few decades.” Violence stemmed mostly from the Jewish community, and only nominally from the Roman public, which meshes well with the New Testament’s accounts. Accordingly, there is no direct persecution of Christians by the Roman government in the New Testament. The Roman government’s only role is mediation. The second phase, 64 to 251 is marked by clear violent persecution from the Roman public, but not continual violence from the Roman government. The third phase, 251 to 313 AD, ends in the Great Persecution.¹¹

Nero is emperor as Paul writes and will reign from 54 to 68, after Claudius’ reign of 41 to 54. Josephus’ account of Nero begins: “Now as to the many things in which Nero acted like a madman, out of the extravagant degree of the felicity and riches which he enjoyed, and by that means used his good fortune to the injury of others.”¹² Without closely reading Josephus’ full account, this gives the impression that havoc reigned during all of Nero’s rule and tempts us to take Nero’s persecutions of Christians later on in his career to be an example of his general attitude and policy towards Christians throughout his whole career. This is not the case.

⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 8-9.

⁹ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *Annotations on the Epistles of Paul to the Romans and I. Corinthians, Chaps I.-VI., The Lutheran Commentary* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1895), 265ff.

¹⁰ Chronology: Paul writes to Rome in 57 before James the Just’ death in 62 (according to Josephus), Peter in 64, Paul’s own execution shortly before 68, and the Jewish revolt in Palestine from 66 to 70.

¹¹ Danny Praet, “Violence against Christians and Violence by Christians in the First Three Centuries: Direct Violence, Cultural Violence and the Debate about Christian Exclusiveness”, *Violence in Ancient Christianity*, ed. Albert C. Geljon and Riemer Roukema, (Brill: Leiden, Boston, 2014), 40.

¹² Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Lynn, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1980), 482.

Nero became emperor at the age of 17 and was administrative consul of Rome between 55 and 60. Because of his age, his advisors helped rule until 62 when he assumed full control of the empire. This is considered the time in Nero's life when he ruled well. Nero "was advised during the first several years of his reign by his tutor, Seneca the Younger, and Burrus, the prefect, or commander, of the Praetorian Guard. Burrus and Seneca were capable leaders, and later Romans considered these years a golden age of good government."¹³ Tacitus and Suetonius record that Nero addressed complaints of overtaxation, limited fines and bail amounts, and lowered the cost of import taxes. He even attempted to repeal all indirect taxes.¹⁴ As Paul writes to Rome, there is little concern within the Christian community regarding Nero. It is not until several years later that Paul and Christians throughout the Roman empire will begin to consider Nero's role in the persecution of Christians.¹⁵

Were Christians persecuted for refusing the imperial cult? Current scholarship agrees that the mistreatment of Christians by representatives of the Roman government during the age of the apostles was minimal if even existent. The main mistreatment of Christians stemmed either from the hands of the Jewish community or for being associated with a rebellious Jewish community.¹⁶ As John Fergusson writes, "It is however hard in the light of our present knowledge of Roman law to suppose that there was a general enactment forbidding the practice of the Christian religion."¹⁷

But were Christians being persecuted at the time of Paul for not engaging in the imperial cult? The worship of an emperor would always begin after his death, and an emperor's desire to be worshipped was considered a negative trait. Historians even conclude, "The Romans never

¹³ Carroll Moulton, ed. *Ancient Greece and Rome: An Encyclopedia for Students*, vol 3 of 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998), 70.

¹⁴ See Tacitus, *Annals* XIII-XIV, and Suetonius, "Life of Nero," *The Lives of Twelve Caesars*.

¹⁵ It is possible Nero did not even see Paul during Paul's first visit to Rome. Although the practice of many before him, the young Nero often did not investigate foreign cases appealed to him unless he had some particular interest in the matter. For more, see A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1963), 108ff.

¹⁶ Note our earlier mention of Jews expelled from Rome because rioting over one named Chrestus. This event marks the climax in several events in which the emperor Claudius responded to problems with the Jewish community in Rome. Even if we emphasize that Paul writes in a golden age of civil rest with the Roman government, Christians included, Paul still writes in the context of Jewish/Hellenistic history. Perhaps Romans 13 stresses how the new Israel ought to live compared to the radicalism and revolutionism of the Jewish community under Rome, especially in Judea.

For example, consider Witherington's introductory remarks on Romans 13:1-7: "Some of the vocabulary has been illuminated by recent sociological studies of the situation of the Roman government during this era. What probably prompts this portion of the discourse is the involvement of some Christians in Rome in the expulsion under Claudius in a.d. 49, and pressure on some to conform to or, on the other hand, rebel against the Roman authorities. Käsemann thinks Paul is reacting here and elsewhere to "enthusiasts" in Rome who had little or no respect for civil authorities. There may be some truth to this, but more importantly Paul wants the Christian community both to be unified and not to draw negative attention to itself, especially after the expulsion. Now was a time for quietly living at peace with one's neighbors, including government officials. We know from Roman historians that in a.d. 57-58 there were considerable unrest and complaining about the extortionate practices of tax collectors in Rome and elsewhere (Tacitus, *Annales* 13.50-51; Suetonius, Nero 10.1)." Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 309.

¹⁷ John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1970), 233.

experienced the same level of ruler worship as did other ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians.”¹⁸ At the time of Paul, there was no persecution based on Christianity’s refusal to partake in the imperial cult in Italy. We have only records of provincial governors making reference to the imperial cult. The deeper concern was Christianity’s threat towards paganism in general. The imperial cult simply established past emperors as some of the many gods of the Roman world. To reject the imperial cult was seen as rejecting the pluralism and polytheism of the culture at large more than a direct attack on the government.

But when gentiles began to convert to Christianity, might we not expect that the pagan communities in which they lived would begin to use against them the accusation of not observing the imperial cult? We do at least have in Acts 17:7 a mention of one popular accusation of disloyalty: in Thessalonica the crowd accuses Paul and Silas before the *politarchoi* (the city magistrates), declaring “All these [the Christians] act against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another King, Jesus.” After that, it is remarkable how little evidence we have of the exact form of the accusations against Christians. We can assume that they were very often accused simply as Christians (see I Petr. 4:15–16)... We can see that up to 249, firstly, Christians were accused simply of being Christians. If other charges were added, they were *flagitia cohaerentia* (associated crimes), cannibalism or incest, rather than non-observance of the imperial cult.¹⁹

The biblical data also supports the theory that persecution was generally created by non-Christian accusers, not the Roman authorities. Persecution from Romans seems to derive more prominently from concern for abandoning Pagan cults in general (consider Acts 19:23ff) rather than the imperial cult.

The mesh of Roman religion and Roman social life was a far greater problem for the Roman Christians Paul writes to, including how closely tied Roman religion was to politics. Religion and religious observance was not separate from politics in the Roman world, but closely intertwined. Part of right governing for officials would be Roman cultic observances, including the sponsoring of religious festivals. The main groups of Roman cultic officers consulted by Roman officials such as the Senate were the colleges of the *pontifices*, the *augurs*, the *sacris faciundis*, the *epulones*, the vestal virgins, the *flamines*, and several more.²⁰ And so general disregard for Roman religious/state festivals, as well as refusal to partake in Roman religious sacrifices and rites would be easily interpreted as disregard for the Roman state.²¹

¹⁸ Kevin M. McGeough, *The Romans: New Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, 2004), 198.

¹⁹ Fergus Millar, *Government, Society, & Culture in the Roman Empire*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton, Guy M. Rogers, *Rome, The Greek World, and the East*, vol 2. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 301, 305.

²⁰ McGeough, 192ff.

²¹ Note the close parallel Roman religion and politics has to Roman religion and cultural norms. For example, Paul’s address to the Corinthians regarding food sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians demonstrates the daily buying of meat was intertwined with religious observance.

The Historical Context: Conclusion

Amnon Linder writes concerning the Roman government's reaction to Judaism at this time: "On the whole, however, the history of the Jews under the Roman Empire can be described as one of practical compromise, interaction, and ambiguity, not inflexibility."²² It seems something similar and even more lenient can be said for the Christians in Paul's time, considering Paul's and other apostles' pleas with the Christians in the Roman empire to be good citizens compared to the radicalism associated with revolutionary Judaism at that time.

Violence towards Christians for being Christians, although clearly emphasized in Scripture, does not take on the tenor and central role of the Christian struggle with civil authority as it will in the second and third centuries. For example, the word martyr, understood to mean someone who dies for the Christian faith, will become a powerful archetype in the 2nd and 3rd century, but does not even exist in the gospels. When Paul refers to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 22:20), "When the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed," the Greek clearly refers to Stephen being a witness (as it does in every other use within the New Testament), not as a label for one being killed for the faith.²³

As Paul writes his epistle, what will cause more trouble for the Christian faith than being associated with Jewish rebels or withdrawing from Roman social norms (such as the observance of the imperial cult) is his teaching concerning the nature of government in general which will "be the foundation of the Christian Empire: that the world was sustained, and the earthly government of it granted, by divine favour."²⁴ What Paul is preaching in Romans 13 is precisely what will cause problems for the church in the future, that governments are ultimately tools of the Christian deity. And to the biblical context of these words of Paul we now turn.

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Chapter 13 in the Epistle to the Romans

Martin Luther writes of Paul's purpose in writing the Epistle to the Romans, "it seems that St. Paul, in writing this letter, wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching." A plain and simple reading of Romans would agree. Paul opens his letter, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16) And he then writes a letter teaching us almost systematically about that gospel.

The first eight chapters of Romans provides us with a Christian enchiridion, beginning first with an analysis of sin and God's wrath (Romans 1-3), then God's righteousness made ours

²² Amnon Linder, "The Legal Status of the Jews in the Roman Empire," *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol 4., ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge, 2006), 129.

²³ See G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27ff.

²⁴ Fergus Millar, *Government, Society, & Culture in the Roman Empire*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton, Guy M. Rogers, *Rome, The Greek World, and the East*, vol 2. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 312.

by faith (Romans 3-4), then the effects of God's righteousness: peace, reconciliation (Romans 5-6), then life as sanctified children of God (Romans 7-8). Paul's second section concerns the role of Judaism in Christianity (Romans 9-11). Paul's final section of his letter, then, includes principles and concepts for Christian living: living as sacrifices, loving one another, loving one's neighbours, and being sensitive to weak consciences (Romans 12-15). It is in the midst of this final section that we find Romans 13:1-7.

Concerning the immediate context of Romans 13:1-7, Paul has just finished his Christian enchriridion and teachings regarding Israel's role in Christianity. He has recited a beautiful doxology (11:33-36), and then begins his final section on Christian living, "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices." (12:1) He teaches that Christians ought to not conform to the patterns of this world (12:2), ought to be humble, especially regarding one's role in the church (12:3-8), and ought to live in love (12:9-21). Here Paul especially begins to describe for us what sanctified living among believers is like: being patient in affliction, blessing those who persecute us, being willing to associate with people of low positions, loving and caring for our enemies, and in general overcoming the evils of this world with good. Just after Paul tells us this, he begins, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities." (13:1)

After his writing on Christians and the government, he continues with his theme of love in the Christian life. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another." (13:8) Paul then encourages Christians to live pure lives and to be sensitive towards people with weak faith (14:1). And so we find the themes directly before and after Romans 13:1-7 dealing with Christian living, especially how Christians are to express their new-found love, a love that makes them both loving towards unbelievers as well as living very different types of lives than unbelievers.

Should Chapter 13 Be Included?

In the midst of poetic exhortations on love, Romans 13:1-7 may seem to occur abruptly with seemingly little connection in the subject matter. Some scholars have also called the vocabulary of 13:1-7 un-Pauline, all to suggest that this text has been redacted. But we might note contextual, stylistic, and historical reasons we should have no doubt Romans 13:1-7 ought to remain where it is.

We have noted several contextual points already: An address concerning Christians and their response to earthly authorities is exemplary for illustrating Paul's thoughts on (1) loving unbelievers through acts of humility, and (2) living very differently than unbelievers. Further (3) Paul has just finished discussing how revenge is not part of the Christian life, but rather ought to be left to God. (12:19-21). Now Paul tells us exactly how God carries out his wrath, and how Christians ought not to fall under the same judgment of the wicked they have learned to forgive. Moo adds for us a fourth point (4), "Due to the transitory nature of this world (12:2; 13:11-14), Christians might respond that they do not need to mind secular authorities, and so Paul teaches

the Romans how obedience to earthly rulers fits squarely in their lives of sanctification, the topic at hand.”²⁵

Further stylistic features demonstrate Romans 13:1-7 fits within Paul’s overall flow of thought. Note the recursion of κακός in 12:21 and 13:3,4, both dealing with the ethical action of Christians towards non-Christian society. The recursion of ἀγαθός in 12:21 and 13:3,4 functions in a similar way. Anadiplosis of ὀφειλάς occurs in v7 and v8, tying our text to the following section stylistically. The recursion of that concept of repaying appears in the previous section as well (12:17 ἀποδιδόντες).

Moo provides four solid historical reasons for including this discourse: (1) Claudius expels the Jews in A.D. 49, which could include Jewish Christians. J. Moiser suggests possible resentment against Rome from the Jewish community might fuel the desire for Jewish Christians now in Rome to rebel.²⁶ (2) Christians may have been tempted to react as the other Romans had been to rising taxes. Tacitus records a tax revolt in A.D. 58 (Ann. 13.50ff) to both direct and indirect taxing by the state. But note that Paul is not warning his audience, but rather commending them for paying taxes. (3) If one is going to talk about obedience to the government in the Roman world, the payment of taxes is the most common expression of this obedience. And also, since Jesus directly comments on paying taxes, Paul could simply be making another one of his many allusions in Romans to Jesus’ teachings. Thus, we do not need a particular historical motivation to find Paul writing on taxes. (4) Note the similarity to 1 Peter 2:13-17. “This suggests that Jesus’ teaching about the relationship of the disciple to the state was the basis for a widespread early Christian tradition, which Paul here takes up and adapts.”²⁷ Therefore, based on contextual, stylistic, and historical reasons, we find Romans 13:1-7 perfectly at home in Paul’s epistle.

Chapter 13 and All of Scripture

Romans 13 elucidates Scriptures’ general teaching on God’s relationship with authority. The truth that “there is no authority except that which God has established,” is firmly embedded in the Old Testament. In Daniel 4:17, an angel tells Nebuchadnezzar, “the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.” In Daniel 2:21, Daniel speaks, “He sets up kings and deposes them.” In Proverbs 8:15, Solomon tells us, “By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just.” In Proverbs 21:1, Solomon tells us, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.” In Jeremiah 27:5, the Lord spoke to Jeremiah, “With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are in it, and I give it to anyone I please.” And in Isaiah 45:1,4, the Lord even speaks to the heathen ruler, Cyrus, “This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him... I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of

²⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 791

²⁶ J. Moiser, “Rethinking Romans 12-15,” *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990), 571-82.

²⁷ Moo, 793.

honour, though you do not acknowledge me.”²⁸ Jesus echoes the words he inspired in the Old Testament when he speaks to Pilate, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” (John 19:11)

But for a new Israel no longer theocratic and spread thin throughout a pagan world, Paul’s words in Romans 13 are deeply needed. Jesus speaks, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” (Matthew 22:16) And Peter writes,

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.¹⁵ For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17)

Further, Paul writes to Titus, “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.” (Titus 3:1,2) And Paul writes to Timothy, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1 Tim 2:1,2) Apart from these four passages, very few other explicit commands for Christians regarding those in secular authority exist in the New Testament. In Romans 13:1-7 we do not find contradictions to the rest of Scripture, but we do find some new thoughts that help Christians understand how their response to the governing authorities fits within their lives of sanctification.

THE GREEK TEXT

Paul’s Line of Thought Based on Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis features demonstrate that vv 1-5 are one unit of thought, and vv 6-7 a second unit, yet closely related and belonging to the same larger discourse.²⁹ This can be seen based on the recursion of ἐξουσία, ἀγαθός, κακός, and διάκονός in vv 1-5 and their absence in vv 6-7. ἐξουσία recurs four times in vv 1-3 to introduce the topic of authority. ὑποτάσσω functions as an inclusio for vv 1-5, appearing both at v1 and v5, marking vv 1-5 as a unit. But note closely related concepts abound in vv 1-7, clearly setting aside this section as its own pericope of the epistle.

²⁸ Cf. also 2 Sam 12:8; Dan 2:37-38; Is 41:2-4.

²⁹ For a thorough demonstration of discourse analysis, see Ernst Wendland, “Stand Fast in the True Grace of God!: A Study of 1 Peter,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/886> (accessed 10 Dec, 2014)

OUTLINE OF ROMANS 13:1-7

NIV:

Line of Thought 1

Thesis: ¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.

Premise for thesis: For there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Inference from premise: ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Summary conclusion: ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

Line of Thought 2

Argument: ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

Concluding overarching Christian principle: ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.

UBS4:

19 μη ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες, ἀγαπητοί, ἀλλὰ δότε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ, γέγραπται γάρ, Ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω, λέγει κύριος. 20 ἀλλὰ ἐὰν πεινᾷ ὁ ἐχθρός σου, ψώμιζε αὐτόν· ἐὰν διψᾷ, πότιζε αὐτόν· τοῦτο γὰρ ποιῶν ἄνθρακας πυρὸς σωρεύσεις ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ. 21 μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ ἀλλὰ νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν.

1 Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὖσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσίν.

2 ὥστε ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται.

3 οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργω ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν· τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἕξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς· 4 θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκῆ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἐκδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι.

5 διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν.

6 διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε· λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσὶν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες.

7 ἀπόδοτε πᾶσιν τὰς ὀφειλάς, τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν.

8 Μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν· ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν. 9 τὸ γὰρ Οὐ μοιχεύσεις, Οὐ φονεύσεις, Οὐ κλέψεις, Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, καὶ εἰ τις ἕτερα ἐντολή, ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ ἀνακεφαλαιούται [ἐν τῷ] Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.

Within vv 1-5, v1 serves as the introduction, stating Paul's thesis on the matter, and then justification for that thesis based on understood biblical truth. Paul follows v1 with a short inference from v2 to v4 supporting his thesis based on the facts that governments rightly are feared because of the God-given authority to punish. Paul's argument here is based on a juxtaposition of right and wrong civil behaviour and the government's positive and negative reactions, which generate the law-breaker's proper response of terror. φόβος and φοβοῦ function as an inclusio for Paul's logical explanation for how those who rebel bring judgment upon themselves, the similar sounding related words beginning in v3 and ending in v4b. It is repeated once more in v7 as part of a poetic structure, but with an entirely different meaning. At the heart of the argument are two sets of ethical opposition. The first set, ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ and κακὸν ποιῆς form both the positive and negative sides of civil action with their appropriate consequences. The second set, θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν and θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργήν demonstrate that God enacts his right judgment through earthly authorities. Whereas the first predicate phrase is followed by the positive thought, God's servant εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν, here it is followed by the negative, an ethical opposition: ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργήν. Paul's use of opposition and juxtaposing of right and wrong begin in v2 and end in v4, ending this argument. V5 is Paul's conclusion to his short inference, a restatement of v1, with an added thought on conscience.

The recurring concept of God's servant occurs at the end of vv 1-5 (διάκονός) and at the beginning of vv 6-7 (λειτουργοὶ) as the concept that bridges two separate lines of thought based on the same proposition, *there is no authority except that which God has established*. Vv 6-7 comprises this second unit of thought. The concept of paying taxes is brought in, justified by Paul's discourse vv 1-5, which he connects to a general Christian principle of giving *everyone what you owe him*. This provides the outline in the diagram above.

Paul's Main Principles

Now that we have reviewed the historical and biblical context, as well as outlined Romans 13:1-7, we turn to the main principles Paul shares with the Christians in Rome. We will meditate on Paul's thesis, on the premise for that thesis, and the two main other principles that Paul develops.

(1) Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. This thesis is derived verbatim from the first clause of Romans 13:1-7: Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities*. Paul begins with Πᾶσα ψυχὴ (*all souls, or everyone*) which reminds us that, even though Paul speaks to Roman Christians, what follows is a general statement that applies to all people, Christian or not, regardless of political affiliation or structure. This is the first that ἐξουσία (*authority*) appears in Romans referring to individuals, and here, paired with ὑπερέχω (*to govern*), ἐξουσίας ὑπερεχούσαις refers to civil authorities. Since we are speaking of πᾶσα ψυχὴ and the authorities that all people are governed by (not just Roman Christians and Roman authority), Paul is referring to the abstract class of civil authority encompassing all governing personnel and institutions.

ὑποτασέσθω translates *submit*. Wallace labels this a gnomic present used to state a general, timeless fact or idea.³⁰ Here, if we recognize this clause as the beginning of a new section, we have good reason to understand Paul using a gnomic present to declare a general fact on which he will then expound. To submit is to do more than obey, but carries with it acknowledgment of one's role under another. This is taught in v7 if we consider respect and honour here to still be part of a general discussion on authorities. Note ὑποτασέσθω's function as an inclusio for vv1-5, marking vv6-7 as a preceding logical thought separate from vv1-5, also highlighting submission as a major, if not the chief, concept in this section.

What is Paul instructing the Christians in Rome to do when he tells them to submit? Paul has begun this final part of his epistle "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices" (12:1), and it seems clear that one aspect of living as a sacrifice is placing oneself under, or submitting to, the authorities God has instituted. If Christian submission to the government mirrors the submission of other areas of Christian life, we know this submission cannot mean explicit obedience and nothing more or less. Sometimes Christian submission means doing more than is told and actively seeking out ways to serve. Sometimes submission means refusing to comply. A Christian wife is not refusing to submit when she exercises Matthew 18's directives and addresses her husband's sin and asks him to stop, or when she refuses her husband's command to sin, or even if she must go so far as to seek church discipline for her husband. Since Scripture does not contradict itself, and Scripture tells wives to both submit and as Christians to address sin, she must be able to submit and address sin at the same time.³¹

Similarly, as we submit to the civil authorities, there are times submission may look like rebellion. Consider Fredrich:

There might be an appearance of opposition to authority but the appearance would be deceiving in such instances. One need not be a calamity howler to suppose that in the near future our church body might have test laws seeking to further equal rights at the expense of our religious convictions regarding the public ministry. We should be thankful for the opportunity of such tests and use them wisely.³²

There may be other grounds as well for Christian civil disobedience, such as challenging the constitutionality of laws, which is part of good citizenship in constitutional democracies, as well as submitting to the highest laws of the land. Paul need not distinguish the times we are to submit to the government and the times, "we must obey God rather than men," (Acts 5:29) because, on

³⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 525.

³¹ I am separating the act of placing one's entire life under the service of another and the act of obedience, which at times is clearly what one does when one is serving another, but not identical with the concept of serving another. Perhaps obedience is a species of the genus submission, but they are certainly not the same.

³² Edward. C. Fredrich, "Practical Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7: God's Governments are to be Obeyed by God's People," Michigan District Convention, 1976. *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/550> (accessed 15 Dec. 2014), 4.

the one hand, Romans 13:1-7 teaches explicitly that authority starts with God, and on the other hand, as in other areas of Christian life, we can submit without obeying.³³

Yet compliance is certainly the dominant feature of submission in vv 1-7. We will demonstrate below that ἀγαθὸν ἔργον refers to civil obedience, not objectively right action, and its opposite refers to civil disobedience. In v6, Paul will highlight compliance to taxation. Why, then, if submission is more than compliance, does Paul stress the compliance aspect of submission more than Christians serving their governments through God-pleasing disobedience? Paul's most extensive study on Christians and governing authorities is written to Christians in Rome, the governing centre of the Western world, and at this time and place in the history of the church, there does not seem to be much reason for God-pleasing disobedience. As we have explored, Christians were not being targeted by the Roman government at this time, but to the contrary, seem to have been largely ignored. Nero is not presently concerned with Christians as he will be later in his rule. We know of no persecution against Christians in Rome for not engaging in the imperial cult. The main source of tension for Roman Christians seem to stem from either being confused for rebels in the Jewish community, or navigating the confusing Roman mesh of polytheistic religion and social civil life. Paul has even relied on the Roman government throughout his ministry to keep himself and his missionary team safe.³⁴ Therefore, the dominant expression of Christian submission and respect for human authority will be compliance. Paul's following argument will have at its core a proverbial proposition, one that only holds and makes sense at a time and place when governments are functioning in a more-or-less God-pleasing way.

This does not mean that when governments fail to operate in a God-pleasing fashion, compliance is no longer the dominant mark of submission to human authority. We are simply trying to explain why Paul would *only* mention compliance in his most lengthy address on the Christian and civil authority. Although Ambrosiaster lived during the legitimization of Christianity, he follows a time when the horrors of Christian persecution from civil authorities were at its worst. And yet he still states, as he reflects on Romans 13:1-7, "Thus no one should despise this law as a human invention; let them acknowledge that divine authority has been delegated to human rulers. To submit to those powers means to avoid out of fear of God what they prohibit."³⁵ And when we consider all NT directives concerning how Christians ought to honour and serve civil authorities, the dominant mark of good citizenship, and thus of submission to civil authorities, remains obedience.

³³ Kurlansky writes concerning non-Christian secular non-violence movements, "Nonviolence is not the same thing as pacifism, for which there are many words. Pacifism is treated almost as a psychological condition. It is a state of mind. Pacifism is passive; but nonviolence is active. Pacifism is harmless and therefore easier to accept than non-violence, which is dangerous." Similarly, the Christian is called not to be passive, but active. To be submissive is not to be passive. To define submission as passive compliance is dangerous and makes it impossible for Christians to act in good conscience when God's word calls them to action.

³⁴ Consider Paul and the proconsul on Cyprus (Acts 13:4ff), Paul's appeal to his citizenship in Philippi (Acts 16:37ff), the officials of Thessalonica releasing Jason (Acts 17:9), the proconsul Gallio's judgment in Corinth (Acts 18:12ff), the riot in Ephesus ending with threats of legal action (Acts 19:35ff), and finally Paul's protection from Roman authorities beginning in Jerusalem to his first visit to Rome (Acts 21:32). And consider the political and civil infrastructure that made it possible for Paul to travel across the Roman world multiple times in relative safety.

³⁵ Ambrosiaster, quoted in Wilken, Robert Louis, ed. *The Church's Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 318.

(2) There is no authority except that which God has established. This second principle is derived verbatim from v1b. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὗσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσίν. *For there is no authority except that which God has established.* Regarding this principle, BDAG reports Paul possibly had in mind either similar Jewish sayings (Cf. Wisdom 6:3) or similar well-known Greek sayings, including the ‘ancient saying,’ τὸ κρατοῦν δύναμιν ἔχει θεοῦ “The government derives its power from God” (Artemidorus; Cf. also Hesiod, Theogony 96).³⁶ Note explicit parallels in Old Testament teaching reviewed above.³⁷ εἰ μὴ provides the following exception in 2b. Note the rhetorical power: The only way to talk about authority at all is to talk about authority that is from God. You cannot talk about earthly authority apart from God. ἐξουσία and τεταγμένα, Witherington interestingly suggests, “are terms for prominent Roman officials.”³⁸

The general thought is clear: God ordains the governing authorities. And if God has ordained the civil governments, then the conclusion to this premise, principle 1, follows logically: We ought to submit to the governing authorities.

The question may arise: Which authority? The Christian Romans had several layers of governing authority, from the non-government agents acting on behalf of the government who collected taxes, to the local police, to the Senate and Nero. When civil war reigns, when politicians (and even relatives of a deceased emperor) jostle for power, as was too often the case in Rome, which authority was the one that God established?³⁹ αἱ οὗσαι is a present active plural nominative feminine participle, attributive substantival with article. Translate *the ones being*, that is, the ones presently existing. I do not think Paul means for us to draw the conclusion that the power presently in control is the one to be obeyed, and the power overthrown recently is not to be obeyed. (See Fredrich, E. C., “Practical Exegesis” for the argument to the contrary.⁴⁰) Rather, Paul is simply drawing the attention of the Roman Christians to the present time, to the present authorities.

What we know is that Paul’s principle is clear, yet the application unclear. Perhaps the best we can hope for is to make the best decision we can with the information available, as long as we reach our conclusion “on the basis of which was the existing authority and not on how good or bad the government was that was being provided.”⁴¹

³⁶ BDAG, throughout this essay, refers to Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

³⁷ Pro 8:15; Dan 2:21; 4:17; Jer 27:5; Isa 45:1,4.

³⁸ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, electronic edition.

³⁹ Contemporary constitutional democracies add an extra wrinkle to the discussion, as not even an individual, but rather a document, is said to be the highest authority.

⁴⁰ E. C. Fredrich, “Practical Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7: God’s Governments are to be Obeyed by God’s People,” Michigan District Convention, 1976, WELS essay file.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 3. That is, we make our decision based on an honest assessment on who God has placed as our authority, and not on whether the authority is acting ethically. And then, recognizing our sinfulness and inability to apply God’s word perfectly, we we pray as Paul teaches us, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24,25)

An unstated corollary of this second principle is, if rebelling against authority is *rebelling against what God has instituted* (v2a) since God has established it, then to rebel against authority, even authority that is not acting in a God-pleasing way, is to rebel against God himself. This is the hard truth regarding rebellion, for it means that to usurp unjust authority is as evil an action as what the unjust authorities are doing. Luther, writing to the peasants of Swabia who would use his teaching to justify their rebellion, argues that there are cases when it is worse:

It is true that the rulers do wrong when they suppress the gospel and oppress you in temporal matters. But you do far greater wrong when you not only suppress God's word, but tread it underfoot, invade his authority and law, and put yourselves above God. Besides, you take from the rulers their authority and right, indeed, everything they have. What do they have left when they have lost their authority?

I make you the judges and leave it to you to decide who is the worse robber, the man who takes a large part of another's goods, but leaves him something, or the man who takes everything that he has, and takes his life besides. The rulers unjustly take your property; that is the one side. On the other hand, you take from them their authority, in which their whole property and life and being consist. Therefore you are far greater robbers than they, and you intend to do worse things than they have done.⁴²

(3) Those who rebel against the government bring earthly judgment on themselves.

This principle is based on Paul's argument from vv 2-4. Paul writes *rulers* (οἱ ἄρχοντες) *hold no terror* (φόβος) *for those who do right* (ἀγαθῶ), *but those who do wrong* (κακῶ). We have mentioned the discourse analysis function of many of these terms: φόβος and φοβοῦ function as an inclusio for Paul's argument, and κακός and ἀγαθός recur in the previous section (12:21) and now in Paul's argument multiple times. φόβος refers here to a concrete (not abstract) understanding, "something terrible/awe-inspiring, a terror" not the abstract concept of "fear; alarm, fright." (BDAG) The city officials are an actual terror, not a manifestation of the concept. τῶ ἀγαθῶ ἔργῳ translate as *for those doing right*, since the good actions represent the personalities doing the good actions. The context suggests we limit the sphere of ἀγαθός to civilly correct action, as opposed to objectively good action. τὸ ἀγαθὸν refers to socially acceptable, helpful, or beneficial work. (Compare with Eph 4:28.) ἀλλὰ τῶ κακῶ, an adversative particle followed by the moral opposite of ἀγαθός, that is, *bad* or *evil*, requires us to supply the missing thought found in the first half of the clause. Translate *but for [those doing] wrong*.

Paul continues with the rhetorical, *Do you want to be free from fear* (φοβεῖσθαι) *of the one in authority* (ἐξουσίαν)? Expecting the answer yes, he continues, *Then do what is right* (ἀγαθὸν) *and he will commend* (ἔπαινον) *you... But if you do wrong* (κακὸν), *be afraid* (φοβοῦ).

⁴² Martin Luther, "Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 46. American Edition. 55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 26.

Here Paul is simply sharing a truism: In general, all things being equal, governments will appreciate Christians and treat them well if they demonstrate good citizenship. Regardless of the current Roman government, the Roman Christians know this does not apply in every circumstance, but like a Solomonic proverb, this is a general truism, not a deductive universal proposition. Note Paul has just quoted a Proverb at length (Pro 25:21-22) in the section prior (Rom 12:20), and expects his audience to understand how this wisdom works. Often, Scripture teaches universal truths, especially regarding salvation.⁴³ At times, though, especially in dealing with Christian civil and social life, Scripture also teaches general truisms.⁴⁴ Proverbs contains a similar general truism as Paul's in Romans 13:

- ¹² Kings detest wrongdoing,
for a throne is established through righteousness.
- ¹³ Kings take pleasure in honest lips;
they value a man who speaks the truth.
- ¹⁴ A king's wrath is a messenger of death,
but a wise man will appease it.
- ¹⁵ When a king's face brightens, it means life;
his favour is like a rain cloud in spring. (Proverbs 16:12-15)⁴⁵

And so here Paul teaches another general truism: Do not submit and you will be punished; Submit, and you will not be punished. Why? He says, *For he is God's servant* (διάκονός) both *to do you good* (ἀγαθόν) when you submit, and to *bear the sword* (μάχαιραν) when you do not submit. Whether or not civil authorities know it, through God's providence he uses the government to keep order and peace, that is, to do διάκονός. This *good* (sometimes translated *righteousness*) we speak of is *civic* good or righteousness. Carl Lawrenz, concerning this, writes,

With threats of punishment human government acts and is to act as a deterrent, checking and restraining the evil designs of the wicked, preventing crime and violence. After a foul deed has been committed, government is to be a revenger, inflicting speedy and adequate punishment on the guilty one. On the other hand, government is to protect the law-abiding citizen that he may be benefited. It is this righteousness among men which God maintains through civil authority that we mean when we speak of civic or civil righteousness. It has to do with outward deeds and acts insofar as they make for a measure of peace and order quite apart from the

⁴³ An example from Proverbs to contrast our examples of truisms: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." (Pro 18:10)

⁴⁴ "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Pro 22:6; cf. also 23:13,14) "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth." (Pro 10:4) Consider also Pro 10:27; 11:14; 12:24; 13:25; 14:20; 16:7.

⁴⁵ Consider also the Proverbs: "Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it fully." (Pro 28:5) "Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious, for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring?" (Pr 24:21-22) "A king's rage is like the roar of a lion, but his favour is like dew on the grass." (Pro 19:12; cf. also 20:2)

motivation by which they are performed. In maintaining civic righteousness human government is not interested in motives as such, in their spiritual value, but merely insofar as motives are effective in promoting certain outward deeds and restraining others.⁴⁶

In a sermon especially directed towards rulers and clergy in Weimar, Luther writes concerning civil authorities failing to function in a God-pleasing way, yet God's word still remaining true:

Moreover, after the Flood, God reestablished and confirmed this in unmistakable terms when he said in Genesis 9[:6], "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." This cannot be understood as a plague or punishment of God upon murderers, for many murderers who are punished in other ways or pardoned altogether continue to live, and eventually die by means other than the sword. Rather, it is said of the law of the sword, that a murderer is guilty of death and in justice is to be slain by the sword. Now if justice should be hindered or the sword have become negligent so that the murderer dies a natural death, Scripture is not on that account false when it says, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." The credit or blame belongs to men if this law instituted by God is not carried out; just as other commandments of God, too, are broken.⁴⁷

Paul knows (and has taught Luther) governments do not operate in God-pleasing ways (such as, in Luther's case, when they do not carry out Genesis 9:6). Yet Paul gives us solid proverbial wisdom when he tells the Roman Christians to submit to the government. This wisdom, as is all of God's wisdom, is priceless. "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17)

(4) For these reasons, Christians ought to pay taxes. After restating his thesis, Paul adds a new line of thought, *This is also why you pay taxes* (φόρους). Taxes also function in the same way as the sword, as a reminder that God has put earthly authorities over us. Taxes remind us we're not our own bosses.⁴⁸ As Ambrosiaster wrote, "Through these they know that they are

⁴⁶ Carl Lawrenz, "Of God, Civic Righteousness, and Their Application to the Boy Scout Question," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* vol 69, No 2, April 1972, pg. 74.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 45. American Edition. 55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 86.

⁴⁸ "A serious error has overtaken those who think that because they are Christians they are not required to pay taxes, or provide services, or show the respect due to those who exercise authority in these matters... Although we are called to a kingdom in which the authorities of this world will have no role, as long as we are on this journey and until we arrive at that age where every rule and authority will be destroyed (1 Cor 15:25), let us be patient with our assigned status in the order of human society." Augustine, quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, ed. *The Church's Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 319.

not free but act under a power which is from God.”⁴⁹ Paul then summarizes his previous premise to the thesis, *For the authorities are God’s servants*, and adds a final description of the government that ought to elicit a Christian response of love for God and his providence, *who give their full time to governing*. Chrysostom comments, “Paul says that by paying him a salary, you admit that the ruler provides benefits to you. Oh, the wisdom and intelligence of the blessed Paul! The system of requisitions by rulers seems to be burdensome and grievous, but Paul makes this system an example of the care rulers exercise for their people.”⁵⁰ In other words, Paul helps us meditate on how governmental authorities care for us.

Paul also uses λειτουργοὶ for the first time to label civil authority. The term applies to both servants of the state, as in Romans 13:6, as well as religious servants (Heb 8:2; Rom 15:6) and generic aides (Phil 2:25). In Jewish circles (esp. LXX), the term has strong religious significance where it is used to describe priests. Paul uses this word to describe a secular civil representative, perhaps calling to the Jewish mind that, unbeknownst to the civil representatives, they are serving in divine functions. θεοῦ strengthens this association.

Paul concludes his meditation on civil government reminding us that “Christians ought to pay taxes” is a corollary of the Christian principle, *Give everyone what you owe* (τὰς ὀφειλάς) *him*. τὰς ὀφειλάς means an obligation or duty. For the financial sense, see Matthew 18:32. For duty within a relationship, see 1 Corinthians 7:3. It is used in the Didache’s Lord’s Prayer: ἄφεσις ἡμῖν τὴν ὀφ. ἡμῶν “forgive us our debt.”⁵¹ The phrase is literally translated *give the debt in everything*, but idiomatically, *pay everyone you owe*. The concept of paying back a debt is not necessary, simply one’s obligation or obligatory response. For example, 1 Corinthians 7:3 cannot accommodate a sense of paying back a debt, but simply responding appropriately. The same can be said of the proper response to authorities.

Paul further illustrates this corollary’s relationship to the subject at hand (and Christian life in general) with the poetic phrase: *If you owe taxes* (φόρον), *pay taxes; if revenue* (τέλος), *then revenue; if respect* (φόβον), *then respect; if honour* (τιμὴν), *then honour*. There is an elliptical use of the article which requires the reader to complete the thought from context and repeatedly provide ὀφειλάς and ἀπόδοτε. φόρον is to be distinguished from τέλος, of which, although widely used in the sense of a *goal, end, conclusion*, there is a specialized sense as “revenue obligation, (*indirect tax*), *toll-tax, customs duties*.” (BDAG) Consider Matthew 17:25 “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes (τέλη ἢ κῆνσον)—from their own sons or from others?” φόβον is translated here as *respect* or *reverence*, a very different use than earlier. Whereas before we speak of the criminal’s *fear* of punishment, here we speak of the *respect* that Christians know the government deserves as God’s institution for the good of those protected by it. This is further emphasized by τιμὴν, a word that can be translated honour or also respect.

⁴⁹ Ambrosiaster, quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, ed. *The Church’s Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 318.

⁵⁰ Chrysostom, quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, ed. *The Church’s Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 323.

⁵¹ *Didache* 8.2

EXEGETICAL NOTES

v1a. Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.*

Πᾶσα ψυχὴ is a nominative singular feminine adjective modifying a nominative singular feminine noun. Literally *all souls*. Better: *persons, people*. (Cf. Acts 2:41, 7:14; 1 Pet 3:20) “In typical OT and Jewish fashion, Paul uses *soul* to denote not one ‘part’ of a human being (soul in distinction from body or spirit) but the whole person.”⁵² Although Paul’s audience are Christians, this is a general statement of morality that applies to all people, Christian or not, regardless of political affiliation or structure.

ἐξουσίαις (ἐξουσία) is a dative plural feminine noun, indirect object. Translate *to the authorities*. “In its simplest meaning this noun means power.”⁵³ Context clearly suggests human/earthly authorities, not spirit powers. “*Exousiai* and *tetagemnai* are terms for prominent Roman officials.”⁵⁴ Luke 12:11 “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities (ἐξουσίας).” Titus 3:1 “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities (ἐξουσίας).” ἐξουσία recurs four times in vv 1-3 with closely related concepts abounding in vv 1-7, clearly setting aside this section as its own section of the epistle.

ὑπερεχούσαις (ὑπερέχω) is a present active dative feminine participle, attributive adjectival, modifying ἐξουσίαις. Translate *the authorities which govern, the governing authorities*. Most likely a reference to governing authorities in general, not just the Roman emperor. 1 Peter 2:13 “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority (ὑπερέχοντι).” Since ἐξουσίαις can refer to either human or spiritual authorities, this participle makes it clear we are referring to human authorities, the ones which govern Paul’s audience.⁵⁵ This also may direct our gaze early on to higher chains of command, to not simply those who carry out the will of magistrates, but to the governing magistrates themselves.

ὑποτασσέσθω is present passive imperative, third person singular. Translate *Let all people be subject*. Used also in v5, *submit* means more than simply obey, especially given the specialized use of this word in Paul’s letters. To submit includes to obey when told, but not vice-versa. To submit denotes acknowledgement of one’s role under another. His use of this word identifies governments as part of the same God-ordained order as the relationship between husband and wife, as well as order within the church. “The normal use of the present tense in didactic literature, especially when introducing an exhortation, is not descriptive, but a general precept that has gnomic implications.” Romans 1:1 is cited as an example.⁵⁶ The gnomic present tense is used to state a general, timeless, fact or idea. Here, if we recognize this clause as the

⁵² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 794.

⁵³ Keith, Schroeder, “An Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7,” Minnesota District Pastoral Conference, April 23-24, 1974. *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, <http://www.wlssays.net/node/1693> (accessed 15 Dec. 2014), 3.

⁵⁴ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, electronic edition.

⁵⁵ For an in-depth treatment, see Moo, 796.

⁵⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 525.

beginning of a new section, we have good reason to understand Paul using a gnomic present to declare a general fact that he will then explore. BDAG: “to bring about an order of things by arranging, arrange, put in place... of an authority structure” when in passive form. Suggested trans. “*the (structures of authority) presently existing are put in place by God.*” Cf. Tit 3:1, 1Pt 2:13, 1Pt 5:5 for more examples of submission to secular authorities. BDAG: “to cause to be in a submissive relationship, *to subject, to subordinate.*” Note ὑποτασσέσθω’s function as an inclusio for vv1-5, marking vv6-7 as a preceding logical thought separate from vv1-5.

There is significant reason to consider the variant in 13:1, *submit* (second person plural) *to all of the governing authorities*, especially given its witness in \mathfrak{P}^{46} . But the variant reading does not alter the meaning of the text at all.

v1b. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὖσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσίν. *For there is no authority except that which God has established.* Regarding the principle *there is no authority except that which God has established*, BDAG writes possibly Paul had in mind either similar Jewish sayings (Cf. Wisdom 6:3) or similar well-known Greek sayings, including the ‘ancient saying,’ τὸ κρατοῦν δύνανται ἔχει θεοῦ “The government derives its power from God.” (Artemidorus; Cf. also Hesiod, Theogony 96) Note explicit and implicit parallels in Old Testament teaching Dan 4:17, 2 Sam 12:8; Jer 2:7,10; 27:5-6; Dan 2:21,37-38; Pr 8:15-16; Is 41:2-4; 45:1-7.

γὰρ is explanatory. **οὐ ἔστιν** is present active indicative, third person singular verb. Translate *there is not*. **ἐξουσία** is a nominative singular feminine noun, *an authority*. See note in v1a. **εἰ μὴ** excludes or provides the following exception. Note the rhetorical power: The only way to talk about authority at all is to talk about authority that is from God. You cannot talk about earthly authority apart from God. **ὑπὸ θεοῦ** is a genitive singular masculine noun. *from God*. ὑπὸ expresses causation or agency here.

αἱ οὖσαι is a present active plural nominative feminine participle, attributive substantival with article. Translate *the ones being*, the ones presently existing. I do not think Paul means for us to draw the conclusion that the power presently in control is the one to be obeyed, and the power overthrown recently is not to be obeyed. (See essay for argument to the contrary: Fredrich, E. C., “Practical Exegesis” ⁵⁷) Rather, Paul is simply drawing the attention of the Roman Christians to the present time, to the present authorities.

ὑπὸ θεοῦ is a genitive singular masculine noun. Translate *from/by God*. An ultimate agent for passive verb ideas “is usually expressed by + genitive... The ultimate agent indicates the person who is ultimately responsible for the action, who may or may not be directly involved (though he or she usually is).” Wallace provides this phrase as an example. ⁵⁸

τεταγμέναι (τασσω) is a perfect passive plural participle, nominative feminine. The perfect may stress the state or condition. The participle creates a periphrastic construction with **εἰσίν**, one that may have become terminology for prominent Roman officials. “*exousiai* and

⁵⁷ Fredrich, E. C., “Practical Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7: God’s Governments are to be Obeyed by God’s People,” Michigan District Convention, 1976, WELS essay file.

⁵⁸ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 433.

tetagmenai are terms for prominent Roman officials.”⁵⁹ Translate *the ones having been arranged/put in place/appointed*.

v2. ὥστε ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται. *Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.* Regarding this clause, note the chiasmic structure: verb, dative, dative, verb. After stating a universal truth, Paul now states a negative consequence which follows deductively from v1: Authorities are from God, and so if you rebel against authorities you are rebelling against God. “As submission denotes a recognition of government’s position over the Christian by God’s appointment, so resistance is the refusal to acknowledge the authority of government.”⁶⁰

ὥστε is an inferential conjunction, beginning an inference based on the propositions of v1. **ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος** is a present middle participle, a singular nominative masculine attributive participle. BDAG: *oppose, resist*. James 4:6 “God opposes (ἀντιτάσσεται) the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Translate *the one who rebels*. **τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ** again, of human authorities. (See v1a.)

τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ “The phrase *tu theou diatagē* was used to characterize the state’s power, which was given divine authority to establish order.”⁶¹ Wallace lists 3:2 as a clear example of a subjective genitive, hence lit. *institution of God* in NIV is *what God has instituted*. BDAG: “that which has been ordered or commanded, *ordinance, direction*.” All other NT uses refer to angels.

ἀνθέστηκεν (ἀνθίστημι) is perfect active indicative. BDAG: To either *set oneself against, oppose* personal or impersonal forces (Elymas the sorcerer stood up to Paul in Acts 13:8, members of the Synagogue of Freedmen could not stand up to the wisdom of Stephen in Acts 6:10), or *to be resistant to power, resist*. Compare with Eph 6:13 where Paul states that the armour of God will help Christians resist (ἀντιστῆναι). **οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες** “The perfect participle... connotes a persistent refusal to recognize government’s role in the divine hierarchy (and not just an occasional failure), as is clear not so much from the tense but the context. Note Eph 6:13 for a similar use of the verb.”⁶²

κρίμα BDAG: “Legal decision rendered by a judge, *judicial verdict*... mostly in an unfavorable sense, of the condemnatory verdict and sometimes the subsequent punishment itself.” Mark 12:40 “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely (λήμψονται περισσότερον κρίμα).” It seems we have three options: (1) civil earthly judgment, (2) eternal judgment (as Moo prefers⁶³), or (3) being under

⁵⁹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, electronic edition.

⁶⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 799.

⁶¹ Witherington.

⁶² Moo, 799.

⁶³ “*Bringing judgment* could refer to the action of the secular ruler... But Paul’s argument has not advanced this far. It is better to understand the judgment here to be the eschatological judgment of God: those who persistently oppose secular rulers, and hence the will of God, will suffer condemnation for that opposition.” (Moo, 799)

God's divine disfavour presently, as any sin this side of final judgment. Becker brings both (1) and (2) together: "This means condemnation in the courts, first of all. And God's punishment too, if a person doesn't repent of this sin, since there could be no government to regulate human affairs without God's providence or permission."⁶⁴ The very next phrase, though, οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες..., seems to define for us clearly the form of judgement Paul has in mind, our first option, civil consequences. So here Paul is beginning to set up for us our proverbial maxim: Do not rebel against the government, or you'll be judged. (Compare to similar Solomonic Proverbs outlined above.)

λήμψονται (λαμβάνω) is future middle indicative, third person plural. *receive, get, obtain*. Examples of receiving an accusative of punishment: Mt 23:13, Mk 12:40, Lk 20:47, Js 3:1, Hb 11:36.

v3a. οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ. *For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.* **γὰρ** notifies us an explanation comes for how those who rebel will bring judgment on themselves, through disobedience to those in authority.

οἱ ἄρχοντες (ἄρχων), can be understood both in a more general way (Acts 4:26 "The rulers (οἱ ἄρχοντες) gather together against the Lord") and perhaps more specially: "Archē refers to a municipal or city official."⁶⁵ See the UBS variant readings of Titus 1:9 for a similar use of ἄρχοντες in the context of the church. Paul now labels those who will bring judgment. **οὐκ εἰσὶν** helps construct a universal negative declarative statement. *Rulers are not terror* is followed by a series of datives stating clearly the parameters for those that do look upon rulers as terrors.

φόβος is a nominative singular masculine noun without an article, with a concrete (not abstract) understanding, "something terrible/awe-inspiring, a terror" not the abstract concept of "fear, alarm, fright." (BDAG) The city officials are an actual terror, not a manifestation of the concept. φόβος also functions as an inclusio for Paul's logical explanation for how those who rebel bring judgment upon themselves, beginning here and ending in v4b.

τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ translate as *for those doing right*, since *the good actions* represents the personalities doing the good actions. The context suggests we limit the sphere of ἀγαθός to civilly correct action, as opposed to objectively good action, as Witherington states, "kalos and agathos characterize politically good conduct."⁶⁶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν refers to socially acceptable, helpful, or beneficial work. Compare with Eph 4:28 "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful (ἀγαθόν) with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." At times combined as ἀγαθοεργός. (see BDAG for Plutarch, Julian... "doing good"). **ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ**, an adversative particle followed by the moral

⁶⁴ Siegbert Becker, *A Transcript of Dr. S. Becker's Lectures on Romans*, transcribed by Gerhold Lemke (Mequon, WI: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Press, 1992), 103.

⁶⁵ Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, electronic edition.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

opposite of ἀγαθός, that is *bad* or *evil*, requires us to supply the missing thought found in the first half of the clause. Translate *but for [those doing] wrong*.

v3b. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν. *Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?* **θέλεις δὲ** is the common particle with the present active (interrogative) indicative of θέλω, beginning a question.⁶⁷ Translate *do you wish*. The indicative of θέλω, as is typical, is followed by an infinitive **μὴ φοβεῖσθαι**. Translate *to not be afraid of*. The accusative τὴν ἐξουσίαν follows, and we begin to note the recursion of both roots ἐξουσία (4 times), and φόβος (5 times). Note also the shift to second person plural, which recurs in vv3 and 4, further marking this as a complete thought, the explanation to v2.

v3c. τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποίει, καὶ ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς. *Then do what is right and he will commend you.* **τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποίει** repeats in accusative and imperative forms the identical ideas earlier in the dative (ἀγαθῶ ἔργῳ). See notes in v3a. **καὶ** functions logically, stating the effect of the previous clause. **ἔξεις** (ἔχω) is future tense, further stressing this clause as a logical conclusion. Note the ethical opposition of ἀγαθὸν ποίει with v4b κακὸν ποιῆς, forming both the positive and negative sides of civil action with their appropriate consequences.

ἔπαινον (ἔπαινος) BDAG: “the act of expressing admiration or approval, *praise, approval, recognition*.” Augustine suggested that this praise was not the “good job” of government official, but a broader understanding of praise. Remembering the harsh persecution of Christians soon after Paul wrote this letter, Augustine desires his readers to see Christians bringing praise to their God even when they suffer wrongly for doing what is right.⁶⁸ Even if that is the case, it seems as if here Paul is simply sharing a truism: In general, all things being equal, governments will appreciate Christians and treat them well if they demonstrate good citizenship.⁶⁹ **ἐξ αὐτῆς**, translated as *from them*, refers to those individuals in authority, the ἄρχων.

v4a. θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. *For he is God’s servant to do you good.* Paul states first the positive function of the government, followed by the negative function. Barrett makes the point that, by curbing and restraining evil, the government becomes one of God’s tools for prolonging one’s time of grace.⁷⁰ In regards to the negative, remember Romans 1:18, which states that God’s wrath is being presently revealed (albeit in a very different way).

⁶⁷ For other interrogative indicatives, see Rom 11:2; Jas 2:5; and cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 449-450.

⁶⁸ Augustine, quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, ed. *The Church’s Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 319.

⁶⁹ See Keegan Dowling’s thesis by request of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for a contemporary analysis of this in Asia.

⁷⁰ Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 229.

θεοῦ γὰρ is listed by Wallace as a clear example of a objective genitive, *one's serving God*.⁷¹ The objective genitive “functions semantically as the direct object of the verbal idea implicit in the head noun.”⁷²

διάκονός (διάκονος) is “one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, *agent, intermediary, courier...* of officials understood collectively as a political system agent.” (BDAG) Col 1:23 “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (διάκονος).” Although this word is widely used to describe the Christian’s activity consciously done for God’s purposes, here we see how non-Christian activity unconsciously can be done for God’s purposes, building on the notion of his sovereignty. **ἐστιν** has the predicate nominative διάκονός. Translate as *He is God’s servant*.

σοὶ, the dative personal pronoun, demonstrates not only God’s sovereignty in general, but also his use of the government to work blessings, that is, **εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν** *for the good* of his Church. Here ἀγαθός may not refer to social or civil virtue, but rather the good God does in this world. (E.g., see Heb 9:11)

v4b. εἰάν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ. *But if you do wrong, be afraid.* **εἰάν δὲ** with the present active subjunctive **ποιῆς** forms a present general conditional, that is, a general possibility or truth. Translate *but if you do*. **τὸ κακὸν** is the object of the conditional, here referring, as earlier, to negative civil behaviour. Note its ethical opposition to v3c ἀγαθὸν ποίει. (See note above.) **φοβοῦ** is present middle imperative. Translate *be afraid* or *be terrified*. This is the final recursive appearance of words related to φόβος (and with similar meaning), bringing to a close Paul’s explanation for how those who do not submit to authority bring judgment on themselves. See earlier comments on φόβος. What follows is a final explanation of why fear is the proper response of a law-breaker to governmental authority before he summarizes his line of thought begun in v1.

v4c. οὐ γὰρ εἰκῆ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ. *For he does not bear the sword for nothing.*

οὐ γὰρ εἰκῆ (εἰκῆ) is an adverbial statement. Translate *to no purpose, for no reason*.

τὴν, writes Wallace, is a *generic article*, one that “distinguishes or identifies a particular object belonging to a larger class.”⁷³ *The sword* designates a class of individuals (not a literal sword).⁷⁴

μάχαιραν is a short sword, dagger, sharp instrument, or generic term for sword-like weapon. Used frequently in the NT (Mat 26:47; Rom 8:35; Eph 6:17; Heb 11:37). **φορεῖ** means to carry indefinitely or habitually. Translate with τὴν μάχαιραν *he bears the sword*. V.P. Furnish argues that μάχαιραν here refers not so much to capital punishment as to taxes gathered by unofficial government representatives, those who gathered fees, duties, and other government charges, individuals who carried swords to identify themselves as legitimately enrolled by the

⁷¹ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 119.

⁷² Ibid., 116.

⁷³ Wallace, 227.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 229.

government.⁷⁵ The context does not support this interpretation, as terms for higher government officials abounds in vv 1-5. Witherington argues that the sword does not directly refer to capital punishment, since Romans did not use the sword for capital punishment, but rather crucifixion or beheading with other weapons. “The “right of the sword,” the *ius gladii*, was the authority of provincial governors to impose capital punishment, but here Paul is speaking about officials in Rome.”⁷⁶ Moo would agree with Witherington, and adds,

“Several scholars point to the Roman *ius gladii*, the authority (possessed by all higher magistrates) of inflicting sentence of death (cf. Tacitus, *Histories*, iii.68). But this practice seems to have been confined to the power of Roman provincial governors to condemn to death Roman citizens serving in the military; it would hardly be relevant to the Roman Christians. Other’s cite Philo’s use of... *sword-bearers*, to refer to Egyptian police officials; still others, the military power wielded by Rome.”⁷⁷

Moo understands the phrase “to refer generally to the right of the government to punish those who violate its laws.”⁷⁸ I Believe τὴν μάχαιραν need not directly refer to capital punishment, but rather is emblematic of one capable of upholding authority through force. Given the context of contemporary Roman penalties, as well as the Old Testament’s clear directives regarding capital punishment, “Paul would clearly include the death penalty in the state’s panoply of punishments for wrongdoings.”⁷⁹

v4d. θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι. *He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.* θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν is used identically in v4a. (See notes there.) But whereas before the predicate phrase is followed by the positive thought, θεοῦ διάκονός to do you αγαθόν, here it is followed by the negative, an ethical opposition: ἔκδικος is used substantively, *one who punishes*. Appears only twice in NT. In 1Th 4:6 (“and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish (ἔκδικος) men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you”) refers to the punishing of God. In Romans 13:4 to the punishing of civil authorities. εἰς ὀργὴν, given the context, is translated either *anger* (Mk 3:5; Eph 4:31) or *wrathful retribution* (1Th 2:16 “The wrath (ὀργή) of God has come upon them at last”).

τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι translates *for the one doing wrong*. This is a negative recursion of τὸ αγαθὸν ποίει in v3. For similar pairing with κακὸν, compare with Rom 7:19.

⁷⁵ V. P. Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 115–41.

⁷⁶ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, electronic edition.

⁷⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 801-2, fn. 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 802, see also 802, fn. 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 802, fn. 54.

v5. διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν. *Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.* vv1-5 function as a unit of thought, with v6-7 stating further general truths derived from Paul’s meditation on authority in the context of his meditations on Christian living in general. In v5, Paul’s point is not that you should do what is right because otherwise you will feel guilty (it seems rather late and brief to be introducing this diverging line of thought), but rather Paul points out that his argument simply makes moral sense, the conscience testifying as well. V5 sums up his argument thus far, and so the role of conscience needs to be explained based on what has just been stated in v1-4. When our conscience tells us to be afraid, not only of God’s wrath but also earthly repercussions, it testifies to God’s use of earthly authorities to uphold his law.

διὸ is an “inferential conjunction... *therefore, for this reason.*” (BDAG)

ἀνάγκη BDAG: “Necessity or constraint as inherent in the nature of things, *necessity, pressure.*” “It is necessary for the sake of this life that we be subject and not resist, even when they want to confiscate goods over which they have been allowed authority. These things are temporal and passing; thus our submission is not in lasting goods but only in those necessary for this time.”⁸⁰

ὑποτάσσεσθαι repeats from v1, and so is an inclusio for v1-5. See notes there. **οὐ μόνον** translates *not only*. Paul then summarizes v2-4 with the following phrase **διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν**, which is recursive of v4. **ἀλλὰ καὶ** translates *but also*. When following a negative, ἀλλὰ καὶ introduces an added contrast. Paul now adds a thought unique from v2-4, a final addition to his argument, marked by his two inferential διὰ’s. The first διὰ illustrates a good natural law argument for obeying the government, richly attested in Old Testament wisdom literature.

διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν. BDAG: “the inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong, *moral consciousness, conscience.*” See the use of συνείδησις in Rom 2:15; 9:1. Translate *because of conscience*. See discussion above (v5) and discussion below regarding διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ.

v6a. διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε. *This is also why you pay taxes.* Jesus’ command to render unto Caesar (Mark 12:17) is almost certainly the wider context for v6’s aside on taxes. And so vv 6-7 can be understood as Paul’s illustration of the general principle established. See also LXX Daniel 4:14. Witherington comments that this section,

seems to have some connection with Mark 12:17, which also refers to the necessity of paying tribute. The obligation to pay what is due goes beyond just money to respect and honor as well. Nero had promised to abolish indirect taxes because of the abuses, but his advisors did not let him do so, which led to some general consternation. There were even open protests in Rome about such taxes when Paul

⁸⁰ Augustine, quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, ed. *The Church’s Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 319.

wrote this letter. So Paul seeks to temper such sentiments among the converts in Rome, lest they draw negative attention to themselves.”⁸¹

Taxes also function in the same way as the sword, as a reminder that God has put earthly authorities over us. Taxes remind us we’re not our own bosses. As Ambrosiaster wrote, “Through these they know that they are not free but act under a power which is from God.”⁸²

διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ with the adjunctive **καὶ** refers back to either v1-4 (a second conclusion along with v5, v5 being the logical summation and v6 now the practical evidence and practical application of v1-4), or is a practical conclusion of all of v1-5, *or* it refers to the added concept *because of conscience*. In other words, because of one’s knowledge of the government’s role in God’s providential plan, Christians willingly and joyfully give taxes. Or, to say it another way, to pay taxes is a matter of conscience. Translate the phrase *Because of this, therefore, also*.

φόρους BDAG: “that which is brought in as payment to a state, with implication of dependent status, *tribute, tax*.” Luke 20:22 “Is it right for us to pay taxes (φόρον) to Caesar or not?” ; 23:2 And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes (φόρους) to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.” Note further the recursion of φόρος ties v6 and 7 together as a clear unit of thought.

τελεῖτε is present active indicative. BDAG: “to pay what is due, *pay*.” Matthew 17:24 “Doesn’t your teacher pay (τελεῖ) the temple tax?” Luke 20:22 “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” Justin Martyr (c.100-165 AD) uses τελεῖν.⁸³ “A few commentators think that *tellies* might be imperative... But Paul’s addition of *for* to *because of this* shows rather conclusively that the verb must be an indicative, because Paul almost always uses this word to introduce the ground or explanation of a previous statement.”⁸⁴

v6b. λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσιν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες. *For the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.*

λειτουργοὶ γὰρ “*Leitourgos* refers to an authorized representative of an administrative body such as the Senate, the proverbial “public servant.”⁸⁵ λειτουργοὶ is a predicate nominative.⁸⁶ The term applies to both servants of the state, as in Rom 13:6, as well as religious servants (Heb 8:2; Rom 15:6), as well as a generic aide (Phil 2:25). In Jewish circles (esp. LXX), the term has strong religious significance, used to describe priests. Paul uses this word to describe a secular civil representative, calling to the Jewish mind that, unbeknownst to the civil representatives, they are serving in divine functions. θεοῦ strengthens this association.

⁸¹ Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, electronic edition.

⁸² Ambrosiaster, quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, ed. *The Church’s Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 318.

⁸³ BDAG: Just., A I, 17, 2

⁸⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 804.

⁸⁵ Witherington.

⁸⁶ Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 266.

θεοῦ is an objective genitive. Chrysostom comments, “Paul says that by paying him a salary, you admit that the ruler provides benefits to you. Oh, the wisdom and intelligence of the blessed Paul! The system of requisitions by rulers seems to be burdensome and grievous, but Paul makes this system an example of the care rulers exercise for their people.”⁸⁷ In other words, Paul helps us meditate on how governmental authorities care for us. Also note our “means of grace” God who provides for us through his *servants*, even though they do not know they are his servants.

εἰσιν translates *they are* with λειτουργοὶ as the predicate nominative. **εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο** translates *to this very thing*. Compare with Eph 6:22; Phil 1:6; 2 Pet 1:5. **προσκαρτεροῦντες** is a present active participle, plural nominative masculine, BDAG: “to persist in something... *busy oneself with, be busily engaged in, be devoted to.*”

ν7. ἀπόδοτε πᾶσιν τὰς ὀφειλάς, τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν. *Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.* A practical conclusion to the line of thought of ν6, as well as for Paul’s full discourse on Christians and governing authorities.

ἀπόδοτε (ἀποδίδωμι) is an aorist active imperative, meaning *to give*, sometimes out of civil obligation (Matt 20:8; 21:41), including taxes (Matt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25) and actions (Matt 5:33; 1 Cor 7:3). **πᾶσιν** translates as *everything* or *all*. The context limits reference to governing officials, but clearly this contributes to a universal principle applicable to whoever a Christian owes anything to. **τὰς ὀφειλάς** translates *obligation*. BDAG: “Rarely used according to etymology.” Obligation or duty. For financial sense, see Matt 18:32. For duty within a relationship, see 1 Cor 7:3. Used in the Didache’s Lord’s Prayer: ἄφες ἡμῶν τὴν ὀφ. ἡμῶν “forgive us our debt.”⁸⁸ The phrase is literally translated *give the debt in everything*, but idiomatically, *pay everything you owe*. The concept of paying back a debt is not necessary, simply one’s obligation or obligatory response. For example, 1 Cor 7:3 cannot accommodate a sense of paying back a debt, but simply responding appropriately. The same can be said of the proper response to authorities.

τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον has an elliptic use of the article which requires the reader to complete the thought from context. Schroeder writes, “Notice here there are two accusatives. The second one is an apposition to ὀφειλάς which is the accusative object of the verb ἀπόδοτε. The first one is the object of the verb *owe* which must be supplied. This holds true for all of the other three pairs that follow.”⁸⁹ Translate, with supplied words in brackets, [*If you owe*] taxes, [*pay*] taxes. See also Matt 25:17; 2 Cor 8:15. See notes on φόρος above in ν6a.

τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, Although widely used in the sense of a *goal, end, conclusion*, there is a specialized sense as “revenue obligation, (*indirect tax*), *toll-tax, customs duties.*” (BDAG) Mt 17:25 “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes (τέλη ἢ

⁸⁷ Chrysostom, quoted in Robert Louis Wilken, ed. *The Church’s Bible* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2012), 323.

⁸⁸ *Didache* 8.2.

⁸⁹ Schroeder, “An Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7,” 16-17.

κῆνσον)—from their own sons or from others?” See also 1 Maccabees 10:31;11:35 and Josephus (Ant. 12, 141).

τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον is our third of four final phrases. τὸν φόβον is translated at times *intimidation* (1Pe 3:14), *fear* or *fright* (2Co 7:15), or here *respect* or *reverence*. (Ac 9:31) Almost every reference in the NT refers to fear of the Lord, but here we note that, to a lesser degree, as his agents in this world, earthly authorities ought to be responded to in fear/reverence. This clearly differs than the fear of law-breakers mentioned earlier (v3), yet its recursion places this verse clearly within Paul’s thoughts of vv 1-6.

τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν. Here it means *honour* or *respect, reverence* (e.g. James 4:4, Hb 3:3, 1Co 12:24; Rev 4:9). Compare with it’s meaning *price* or *value* (Mt 27:9; Ac 19:19; Col 2:23).

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RECONSTRUCTION OF LOCATIONS AND LETTERS IN PAUL'S CHRISTIAN LIFE

32-46	CONVERSION AND EARLY TRAVELS	Ac 8:1, 9:1-31, 13:1-3
	32 Conversion	Ac 9:3-19; 22:6-18; 26:12-19
	32-35 Damascus, Arabia, Damascus, Jerusalem	Ac 9:19-22, Ga 1:15-17, Ga 1:18
	35-44 Tarsus and Cilicia	Ac 9:29-30; Ga 1:21; Ac 15:23,41
	45-46 Antioch	Ac 11:25-26
	46 Jerusalem for famine visit	Ac 11:27-30; 12:25; Ga 2:1-10
	46 Antioch	Ac 12:25
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47-48	FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY	Ac 13:4-14:28
	47-48 Seleucia, Cyprus (Salamis and Paphos) , Perga of Pamphylia, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra , Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch	Ac 13:4-14:28
	48 Galatians written from Antioch	
	49 Jerusalem Council	Ac 15:1-30
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49-52	SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY	Ac 15:36-18:22
	49-50 Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Troas , Neapolis, Philippi , Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth	Ac 15:30-18:17
	50/51 1 Thessalonians written from Corinth	
	50/51 2 Thessalonians written from Corinth	
	51-52 Cenchrea, Ephesus , Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch	Ac 18:18-22
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53-57	THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY	Ac 18:23-21:17
	Galatia and Phrygia, Ephesus	Ac 18:23-19:41
	57 1 Corinthians written from Ephesus	
	Macedonia	Ac 20:1
	57 2 Corinthians from Macedonia	2Co 2:13; 7:5
	Greece	Ac 20:2
	57/58 Romans written from Corinth	
	Macedonia, Troas , Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Togyllium, Miletus , Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre , Ptolemais, Caesarea	Ac 20:3-21:14
	58 Jerusalem	Ac 21:21-23:22
	58-60 Caesarea (Felix, Festus, Agrippa)	Ac 23:23-26:32
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61-63	FIRST ROMAN IMPRISONMENT	Ac 27:2-28:31
	61-62 Adramyttium, Sidon, Myra, Fair Havens, Malta , Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, Forum of Appius, Rome	Ac 27:2-28:31
	62 Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians written from Rome and delivered together by Tychicus	
	63 Philippians written from Rome	
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63-65	FOURTH JOURNEY	
	63/64/65 1 Timothy written from Macedonia	
	63/64/65 Titus written from or on the way to Nicopolis	
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66-67	SECOND ROMAN IMPRISONMENT	
	66 2 Timothy written from Rome, right before imprisonment	
	67 execution under Nero	

Discourse Analysis Diagram

19 μὴ ἐαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες, ἀγαπητοί, ἀλλὰ δότε τόπον τῇ ὀργῇ, γέγραπται γάρ, Ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω, λέγει κύριος. 20 ἀλλὰ ἐὰν πεινᾷ ὁ ἐχθρὸς σου, ψώμιζε αὐτόν· ἐὰν διψᾷ, πότιζε αὐτόν· τοῦτο γὰρ ποιῶν ἀνθρακας πυρὸς σωρεύσεις ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ. 21 μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ ἀλλὰ νίκα ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν.

1 Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω.
οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὐσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν.

2 ὥστε ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται.

3 οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν· τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς· 4 θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἐκδικὸς εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι.

5 διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν.

6 διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε· λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσὶν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες.

7 ἀπόδοτε πᾶσιν τὰς ὀφειλάς, τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν.

8 Μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν· ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν. 9 τὸ γὰρ Οὐ μοιχεύσεις, Οὐ φονεύσεις, Οὐ κλέψεις, Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, καὶ εἴ τις ἕτερα ἐντολή, ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται [ἐν τῷ] Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.

Recursion

- κακός (12:21,13:3,4) recurs in two different sections, used similarly (ethical action towards non-Christian society).
- ἀγαθός (12:21, 13:3,4) recurs in two different sections, similar to κακός.
- ἐξουσία recurs four times in vv 1-3 with closely related concepts abounding in vv 1-7, clearly setting aside this section as its own section of the epistle.

Anadiplosis

- λειτουργοὶ
- ὀφειλάς (13:7, 13:8) ends one section and begins another, but with very different purposes, to make a smooth transition to new but conceptually related subject material.
- The recurring concept of God's *servant* occurs at the end of vv 1-5 (διάκονός) and at the beginning of vv 6-7 (λειτουργοὶ) as the concept that bridges these two different lines of thought based on the same proposition, *there is no authority except that which God has established*.

Inclusio

- ὑποτάσσω functions as an inclusio for vv 1-5, appearing both at v1 and v5, marking vv 1-5 as a unit.
- φόβος and φοβοῦ function as an inclusio for Paul's logical explanation for how those who rebel bring judgment upon themselves, the similar sounding related words beginning in v3 and ending in v4b. It is repeated once more in v7 as part of a poetic structure, but with an entirely different meaning.

Ethical opposition

- θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν and θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἐκδικὸς εἰς ὀργήν: whereas the first predicate phrase is followed by the positive thought, *God's servant* εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν, here it is followed by the negative, an ethical opposition: ἐκδικὸς εἰς ὀργήν.
- ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ and κακὸν ποιῆς forms both the positive and negative sides of civil action with their appropriate consequences.