

Romans 13:4-10 "Owe No One Anything, Except To Love One Another"

Our text from last week and this morning is one of those areas that can create a lot of tension for a person because we're talking about an area of life which arouses certain negative feelings. And it's the area of Government and the people who run it.

And yet as we saw last week it is God Himself who gives the authority to people rule over those in their care. As Jesus told Pilate, "you would have no power or authority had it not been given to you from above."

And so we must realize that God has sanctioned and authorized the use of authority in the sphere of governing people. The intent by God is to bring orderliness to life and curb the sinful behavior of men so there will be some semblance of peace in any society.

And that's a good thing. And this is what Paul brings out in Rom 13:4 "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."

Now, Paul basically defines the role of those who govern in verse 4. First and foremost they are servants, and as Charles Hodge points out, "the welfare of society is the only legitimate object which they as rulers are at liberty to pursue."

Often, when we think of God's work in the world we think of His will to bring salvation to men. But this is not the only work of God. There is the salvation of His people in the world which the Lord has given us to pursue in Christ, but there is also the preservation of the world which must be pursued because of sin.

And what Paul is doing in writing the Roman Christians is to remind them of their responsibility, as men who have received salvation in Christ, to now play a role in the preservation of their world so that the Gospel may go forth without restraint.

In fact, it is God who brings such restraint on evil, through governing authority, so that Christ's message can be brought to the world. In Paul's day it was possible to travel the world in relative safety because of Roman rule.

God used even Pagan rulers to assure that Paul, and others like him, could go from country to country bringing the life giving message of Jesus Christ. And so when Paul says that these rulers are ministers of God in verse 4 he means that God uses even pagan servants in secular life to accomplish spiritual ends.

Now whether these rulers realize they are being used by God as ministers to His glory is another issue. But it wouldn't be the first time that God used such rulers to accomplish His will as is clearly seen with Pharaoh and the nation of Israel.

This is what Paul points out in this very letter.

Rom 9:17 "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." [Exodus 9:16]

So the whole idea of government is to do good to the people. And as that is the objective, Paul says to submit and obey. If you don't, Paul says in verse 4, then you should be afraid. The Greek word for afraid in our text is *phobeo* which means to frighten. *Phobeo* is where we get our English word phobia which is defined, obsessive fear or anxiety.

And so, you have claustrophobia, the fear of small closed-in places, agoraphobia, the fear of open places and of course my favorite, xenophobia, the fear of foreigners, whatever in the world that is.

Paul is saying that if you do wrong and live unlawfully in your society you should be afraid. Why? Because God gave the authority to the rulers to punish the offenders.

This is why he says that they do not bear the sword for nothing. In other words, the sword has been given them by God's authority to make sure the preservation of society goes forward, with the ultimate purpose of Christ's gospel being able to go forward.

That doesn't mean that the government is responsible for taking the gospel out, it simply means that those believers in Christ may have the freedom to take it out to the world, under the protection of the government.

In a perfect world this would be accomplished. Unfortunately, this is not a perfect world and many governments actually come against God's will of protecting the freedoms of people to proclaim

freedom to the captives. Freedom, that is from the penalty and power of sin, through Jesus Christ.

Those authorities and all authorities will be responsible to God. But as government has been given the authority to curb sin in the form of civil disobedience they have also been given the authority to punish such behavior.

This is what Paul means by bearing the sword. The sword is used as a symbol of judgment and wrath as it pertains to any particular crime. And depending on the crime the power of the sword is used accordingly.

If a person steals something the power of the sword may be used in a lesser way than if a person murders someone. But the implication is clear from scripture that the sword may include the ultimate punishment of taking a person's life if they have committed a crime worthy of such punishment, and God Himself has given them that authority.

This is an issue that many people have a problem with today because they feel capital punishment is an archaic and inhuman form of punishment. 'We're much more civilized today and therefore we must be much more restrained in the use of the sword.' So goes the argument.

For lack of time let me quickly give you the biblical basis for capital punishment and why it must still be in effect today. You might remember from your Sunday school days as a child that the 6th commandment, taken from Exo.20:13 stated, "Thou shalt not kill."

I remember back in the 60's when the Vietnam War protestors would parade signs through the streets with this statement. The implied thought was that no form of killing was acceptable. What they and others didn't seem to realize is that the 6th commandment does not state that "Thou shalt not kill", even though the KJV and others have translated it such.

The Hebrew word *ratsah* does not mean simply to kill, but to murder. This is why many of the better translations read, "You shall not murder."

To murder is to take someone's life in a way that does not include defending oneself in war or at home. Because murder is taking a human life unlawfully God speaks to its punishment in Gen 9:6

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."

The implication is that the crime may have been against another human being but ultimately it is against the God who gave life to man. And in that circumstance, where you unlawfully shed man's blood, God requires yours.

Exo 21:12-13 "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. 13 However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. 14 But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death."

Again, this in the civil context, not in the context of killing in war time circumstances. Although murder can take place in time of war, the broad scope is implied in these commandments.

Notice too, that a distinction is made between intentionally and accidentally killing someone. Today we might refer to it as premeditated murder and unpremeditated killing. Now, the question has been raised, does the N.T. support this teaching? The answer is yes. The reason is that murder is still a crime against God Himself.

God supports capital punishment in the N.T. as Jesus submits to it when He was crucified. And remember that Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill its requirements. Unlike Christ's case capital punishment must be restricted to such heinous crimes deserving of such punishment. And that's why it must be entered into carefully and methodically according to the law.

Rom 13:5 "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience."

Here Paul travels from the fear aspect, which society at large must have before them, to the conscience aspect, which all people, especially believers must ever have before them. And the idea here is that for the believer our motivation must not be limited to fearing the repercussions of unlawful behavior, but rather go beyond them to not behaving in an unlawful way because we honor God who has placed men over us for our good.

We desire to do good because we love God. That's what Peter was referring.

1Pe 2:13-16 "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."

As servants of the Most High God we must confirm God's will that He has authorized the governing authorities and therefore we must honor God in this area with good consciences before Him as we submit to governing authorities.

Of course there will always be tensions in this arena as those governing authorities are still responsible to do good to the people and not evil. And when they do evil God sanctions certain responses by the people.

But, here Paul and Peter are speaking in ways which assume that government is generally doing good to the people with the understanding that the governing authorities are themselves sinners and therefore prone to evil in the midst of trying to do good.

And so, because God sanctions this authority it necessarily needs certain things to be organized and efficient and Paul touches on this in our text.

Rom 13:6-7 "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."

This is an area at which everyone cringes. And with the deadline approaching for submitting your taxes it really hits home. I'm not going to defend every tax which is levied on us. Rather, I'm simply going to say that taxes are essential to running the government.

I heard someone relay an incident in which they were talking with some gentlemen from England. It was around the time of the 4th of July and the Independence of America from England's control was being discussed.

And this American reminded these Englishmen that it was because of taxation without representation which started the whole process of the Revolutionary war. And the Englishman responded by

agreeing that taxation WITHOUT representation was certainly at issue, but then added, I can see how you would hate such a notion. So, how do you like taxation WITH representation these days?

There are some practical reasons for taxes which we just don't think about. If you're driving on the road those roads need to be kept up. If you're hooked up to water, electric, sewage someone has to be managing them.

If you've ever had to call on the police or fire department, then you ought to be aware that if they are to be effective and able to respond quickly, money's need to gathered to support their use in society.

It's certainly true that there are taxes which are excessive and in some cases ungodly. But, as a general rule taxes, along with respect for the authorities placed over us, are just a part of life for our good as God has ordained it.

Where there is room for legal dissent against ungodly laws or taxes or anything else which may be harmful to society we have an obligation to work in the framework of government to change those things which we can.

Our present Congress seems to be working in a direction of bringing some sanity back to this area of taxes and laws and we should be supportive of such moves. But as we move on in our text we see that Paul goes from society at large, and our participation in it and attitude towards it, to our responsibility towards individuals within that society.

Rom 13:8 "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."

A.C. Hervey in the Pulpit commentary makes this observation of this idea of love and the law coming together.

"At first sight, there seems a contradiction between law, which expresses authority, and is sanctioned by force, and love, which is spontaneous, and is of the heart.....

..... Christ Himself, however, brought the two into harmony when He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments; and the apostle, in this passage, shows that, really and essentially, the two are one."

Now, this is not meant to imply that simply by obeying the laws of the land that you are necessarily loving. However, if we are loving God then it will demonstrate itself in obedience, first to Him, but by extension, to one another. This all fits into practical theology where in loving God it will contribute to effective government, with the understanding that government is to be for the good of individuals.

Now when Paul says "owe nothing to anyone" his intent is not to get into a discussion on lending or borrowing. And though there are principles which come into play regarding money and its proper use Paul is using a play on words to make a point.

And it comes on the heels of giving what is due to the authorities; taxes, revenue, respect, and honor. Paul's point is owing to someone that which must never be assumed to be met and therefore must go on being owed. And that which must always continue being given out is love. And here is where he makes the connection to the law which is assumed to be a part of promoting peace.

If we love one another then, in effect we fulfill the law. Paul then goes on to lay out particular laws. And notice he doesn't quote the law of Rome, or of Greece but the laws of God which apply to all men everywhere.

Rom 13:9 "The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," [Exodus 20:13-15,17; Deut. 5:17-19,21] and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [Lev. 19:18]

Part of what Paul is saying is that what true love for God will do is to cut through the legalistic way of approaching life where we go down our checklist of do's and don't's and then try to apply those things to how we treat people. Paul says that if we are consumed with loving God then what will happen is that we will naturally do those things which please Him, including things which please others and are for their good.

Committing adultery, stealing, coveting and so on are not only not loving our neighbor, they are not loving God. But simply doing what is right in the sight of God is not necessarily loving God either.

We read in Mat 19:16-21 "Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" 17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." 18 "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" 20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

This man was "doing" all the right things, but that did not gain him the kind of relationship which God desires for us, and that is intimate communion with Him which can only be gained by humbling ourselves before Christ and trusting Him alone for our salvation. And that's what is meant by following Him, abiding with Him. This is the kind of love Paul speaks of. But we must never think that love is somehow separated from the truth.

Love and obedience go hand in hand, but it's an obedience from the heart as we walk in the truth of God's word. But we don't want to get the cart in front of the horse. 'God I'll obey You and then I'll know Your love.'

No, it's, 'God I love You because You first loved me, and I desire to obey You out of that love.' And as we love God with all of our heart, soul and mind we will then be predisposed to love others.

And the reason is that the kind of love that caused Christ to give His life for you and me is the same love that dwells in our hearts by faith in Christ, and now we have something substantive to give to people and a real motivation to give it.

That motivation is the understanding that we didn't deserve the love God gave us and often times our neighbor may not deserve to be loved, and yet because we've been given the love of God we want to give it away so that others may come to this loving God.

Rom 13:10 "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

James calls this the royal law in Jam.2:8 and Jesus sums it up in Mat 7:12 "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Paul tells us in Gal 5:14-16 "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

Loving our neighbor can only truly be accomplished as we live by the Spirit, which includes the Truth the Spirit imparts in His word and the power of the Spirit who enables us to walk according to His will in His love.

Walking in the Spirit puts aside the selfish desires we have and looks to help one another to seek God and love Him above all. And as we encourage each other to love God above all, guess what happens? Each one will begin to love his neighbor.

Let me end with God's word which punctuates the need for *agape* or Godly love and what love does in a practical way towards its neighbor.

1Co 13:1-8 "If I speak in the tongues [Or languages] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails."