



We left off last time at chapter 13 (Read chapter 13)

In chapter 13 – vs. 1-7, we read Paul's understanding about the Christian attitude to civil rulers. Paul makes it clear that those in governing positions, govern by the authority of God, to keep order within the state. To reward those who do good, and to punish those who do evil. If a person does good, they have nothing to fear from those in power. But if a person does what is wrong, those in government have the right and the responsibility to punish them for their wrongdoing. If you owe taxes, you need to pay them to support the work of the governing authorities because they are doing God's work.

Many scholars believe that because of the unusual placement of vs 1-7 of chapter 13, that this section may not have been a part of the original letter. They seem to interrupt the text. If you go from chapter 12, vs 21, directly to chapter 13:vs 8 and following, they seem to mesh better, because they are about Paul giving advice. Interestingly, there is no mention of Jesus Christ in Chapter 13:1-7. Some scholars believe and go so far as to suggest they may be not authored by Paul and were inserted to appease Rome. Remember the church and Roman government were in an adversarial relationship. The church was being persecuted by Rome. So how might you deflect some of the harsh treatment of the church? Perhaps by writing verses like vs. 1-7 about the authority of government coming from the authority of God.

But other scholars do believe these words were penned by Paul and are spoken to Jews who were more zealous in their opposition to Rome, due to their persecution. It may be a bad analogy, but I think it is similar to what Nancy Pelosi is having to do with the far left wing of the Democratic Party. Paul was saying something to tone down the more zealous party line within Judaism, and Nancy is trying to reign in the more far left wing of her party. Well, just a thought!

Paul may be thinking about Jesus words – “render to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God what is God's” (Mark 12:17). Paul does believe that God is in control and that nobody secures a position of rulership unless God permits it. Ordered government is not a human device, but something of divine origin. So citizens must submit to its laws.

In Vs. 1 of chapter 13 Paul says his thoughts best. “let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God”

Vs. 8-10 – Paul turns to the Christian attitude towards people in general. Paul makes the claim that the Christian life is lived out characterized by love. That is our calling as Christians, to love one another.

Vs. 8 – Paul says owe nothing to anyone. Fulfill your obligations. What you owe others, is to love them. Paul has just said, pay what you owe the government in vs. 1-7. Now he carries that over into our personal lives. But Paul goes beyond the concept of paying off personal debt and loans. He says the debt of love can never be discharged. It is a life long obligation that we owe to all people. Loving people is non ending for the Christian. Unlike financial debt, we can never say, “I have done all the loving I need to do”. The debt of love is unending, it is a permanent obligation of the Christian life.

Origen, long ago, put it this way: “The debt of charity is permanent, and we are never quit of it, for we must pay it daily and yet always owe it”.

Paul says further in Vs. 8 – Those who love their neighbor have fulfilled the law.

Vs. 9 – Pauls cites 4 of the 10 commandments and he says the 10 commandments are summed up with the phrase – “you shall love your neighbor as yourself”. Of course, this is what Jesus said when asked what was the greatest commandment? He answered: “to love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:28-34).

Vs. 10 – Paul states this theme in a different way. “Love does no wrong to a neighbor”. Love fulfills the law.

Vs. 11-14 – can be summarized as “Living in the light”. In these verses Jesus takes on the issue of putting away our fleshly desires and the works of darkness. He calls believers to walk in the light.

Vs. 11 – Come on Christians wake up!! – In effect Paul is saying, don’t live like everyone does in the culture lives. Rise above it. You belong to God, now act like it and live like it. Let go of the forces of darkness embraced in culture. Your salvation is near. Set aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. God will protect you with His light. Quit living to gratify the flesh. Let go of drunkenness and orgies, sexual immorality and debauchery. Quit living with dissension and jealousy.

How can we do this? Paul says – “by clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. Put on Christ. He is our only protection, our only hope to live a Godly life of honor. No longer think about how to gratify the desires of our sinful nature. What Paul is saying is that human life is always a struggle between the forces of our fallen sinful nature, and the life God makes possible for us – a life of light and love. And if we want the life God wants for us, we must put on new garments – we must clothe ourselves in Him.