

Settle up, Pay up, Wake up, Dress up

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- [0 : 00] Romans chapter 13, the whole chapter. Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.
- The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.
- For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from the fear of the one in authority?
- Then do what is right, and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid.
- For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath, to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also as a matter of conscience.
- [1 : 17] This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them.
- If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honour, then honour. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.
- For whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and whatever other commands they may be, are summed up in this one command.
- Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time.
- The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over. The day is almost here.
- [2 : 30] So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.
- Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. This is the word of the Lord.
- Let's pray as we sit. May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight.
- O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Good morning.
- Good morning. I'm sorry I've got a rather croaky voice this morning, so that may make my voice worse than usual. This morning we're restarting our studies in Romans, and we're looking at chapter 13.
- [3 : 44] It's quite a lot to look at this morning, so I've got my eye on the clock. I've given you a simple outline on your notice sheet. And now we're into chapter 13.

We had 11 chapters that gave you the whole wonderful, splendid picture of how God has saved us through Christ. And then we have these five chapters at the end of Romans that show us how we should respond to the wonderful thing that God has done for us.

In chapter 12, in the first couple of verses, it talked about our response to God. In worship, defined broadly.

In verses 3 to 8, our response to ourselves. In sober judgment. In verses 9 to 21, in our response to other people.

Now as we come to chapter 13, the first seven verses are about how we respond to the state. How we think about the state. And in verse 1a, Paul says, let everyone be subject to the governing authorities.

[5 : 00] And then at the end of this section, verses 6 and 7, he gets on to taxes. And he says, in verse 7, give to everyone what you owe them.

If you owe taxes, pay taxes, if revenue, then revenue. Now I'm not sure how much emphasis there is on taxes in this section.

But I think there might be a certain amount. Because it was a really controversial area in Paul's day. There were riots in Rome over indirect taxes.

Which I think is what is meant by the word revenue here. I think the taxes are your direct taxes. And your revenue, and your revenue, I think, is your indirect taxes, customs duties, or maybe that's VAT or whatever.

Whatever they had in ancient Rome. Apparently, Nero promised to abolish indirect taxes, but he never kept his promise.

[6 : 01] I won't make any comment about that. So Paul says to the Christians, pay up, or settle up, is the word I've used here.

So I've got my four ups, and they're not all the same. Settle up. Later on, we have pay up, wake up, and dress up. But settle up, pay your taxes.

And he says you should do that, not just because of possible punishment if you don't, but because of conscience. You should do that because the state authorities are instituted by God.

And he says that three times. There is no authority except that which God has established. One. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. So there it is, thrice. Very clearly, they're established by God.

[7 : 07] And I think we need to hear this because, well, just at the moment, many of us are pretty negative about government. I mean, I look with disheartenment bordering on despair at government at the moment.

I'm not particularly inspired by what's happening in Westminster or Hollywood. If we look back a few years ago, we all remember, well, many of us will remember the Westminster expenses scandal.

We'll remember about duck houses, whatever a duck house is. House for ducks, I suppose, and the like. We remember all that and we just are horrified at it all.

And then we come back to Paul's words. the authorities that exist have been established by God. And we need to hear that, or at least I need to hear that.

It would have been a surprise to Nero had he read the letter to the Romans, because Nero and the other emperors at least professed to believe in their own divinity, that they held power in their own right.

[8 : 17] But Paul says they hold power as a gift from God, the one God, the God of Israel. Jesus said to Pontius Pilate, you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

Now, Pilate was misusing his authority in condemning Jesus, but the authority he used to do this was given him by God. For all the faults of civic authority, we need them because God wants his world to be ordered, not chaotic.

But if we're struck this morning by the thought that the civic authorities are instituted, ordained by God, the thing that really struck me in this passage was the next bit.

Was that the rulers are God's servants. Isn't that an extraordinary phrase? The one authority is God's servant. Again, it appears thrice.

They are God's servants, agents of wrath. They are God's servants who give full time to governing. And if you look at the Greek words, one of them is diakonos, and the other one is leturgos, diakonos twice.

[9 : 45] You can guess what the word diakonos means. It's the word from which we get our word deacon. James' role in our church at present. And leturgos, well, I guess the word liturgy comes from it.

It can be used as priestly service in the temple. So what Paul is saying is that civil servants are ministers of God.

So what is this ministry that they have? It's in verse 4. The one in authority is God's servant for your good. If you do wrong, be afraid.

For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. There are two ministries they have. They're just the inverse of each other. the one we're very familiar with is that they are to punish the wrongdoer with no doubt that that's essential in society.

That's what prevents it all falling apart. If evil were not prevented in any way that would be appalling. And I wonder if one of the links between this section and the previous section in chapter 12 comes here.

[11 : 06] If you look at 12:19 when Paul's writing to at that stage he's talking to individuals he says do not take revenge my dear friends but leave room for God's wrath for it is written it is mine to avenge I will repay.

Now as individuals we mustn't take revenge. That doesn't mean that evil isn't evil or it doesn't matter but it's just that in many cases as private individuals we have to walk away from the situation it's not up to us it's not possible for us not right for us to sort things out.

How God sorts it out in this world or the next is up to him but sometimes he sorts things out through the civic authorities.

There is a difference between the way that the civic authorities behave and the way that we should behave. Civic authorities frequently must do things that private individuals may not do.

if someone deliberately injures you then it's not up to you to get your own back but the state should bring that person to justice and that's one of the two ministries of these ministers of God who operate out of the city chambers or wherever it is.

[12 : 48] there's also the other role that the other ministry that these ministers have I read them both out earlier he's God's servant for your good and I think that means that it's their job to commend what is good.

I suppose we might think of the honors system they're part of that process perhaps that's why we're so disappointed when we see someone who is honored behaving badly and not behaving appropriately to the status that they've been given given that we think mainly of the status punishing people rather than honoring them maybe part of the problem is that we're not that clear what we want honored commending the good is one thing but agreeing what's good is quite difficult and then he comes to the particular challenge at the end he says give to everyone what you owe them if you owe taxes pay taxes if revenue then revenue if respect then respect if honor then honor he says to the Romans be good citizens pay your taxes settle up now of course that isn't the all that the

Bible says about the role of the state it's a very important I don't usually I usually like to stick with the passage I've been given and sort of just explore it but I think in this particular case it's important to move outside the passage a little bit there's a well-known story of Michael Cassidy of Africa Enterprise going to see President Bota in South Africa in 1985 to complain about apartheid and he thought about what he was going to say and he had his words all worked out and when he got there all that happened was that President Bota opened his Bible and read Romans 13 1-7 and sent him on his way as if that was all the Bible had to say about authorities do what you're told I mean if you go through the Bible you'll find lots of examples of people disobeying the state you could think of the Hebrew midwives in

Exodus when they were told by Pharaoh to kill the newborn Hebrew boys and they didn't or we can think of when Nebuchadnezzar issued his edict to all his subjects that they must worship the golden image well Shadrach Meshach and Abednego refused to obey or Daniel when he was told not to pray he carried on praying Jesus said render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's or the apostles when they were told not to preach in Jesus' name any longer said we must obey God rather than men but there is another half that you need to understand but I think this morning the important thing is to be thoughtful about

Romans 13 I mean a positive view of the state might send some of us out this morning to get stuck into politics I mean do you want to be a minister of God well when we say that we start thinking of the sort of things that we can do in church we celebrate James' ministry as a deacon but here we hear this morning that we might actually be getting ourselves elected or getting ourselves into important roles in government and carrying out God's ministry somewhere like that it's worth at least giving it a thought and praying about it today and as we come to the last verses again as I said we're about taxes and settling up that provides Paul with his link through to the next section between seven and eight eight starts let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law not only do we have to settle our taxes up we have to pay up the debt of love but it might it also seems that there's a very brief reference to debt in general in this section let no debt remain outstanding it does seem that it's telling us to avoid debt in general does the debt the text prohibit us from taking on any debt at all

[18:21] Douglas Moo in his commentary put it like this Paul is not prohibiting us from borrowing money but demanding we pay back what we owe either way what this passage means at the very least is that we are to be careful about our money that we are not to take on more debt than we can handle and that's an important instruction to our debt ridden society but that's not the main point Paul's making here he moves on from taxes his next main point I think is about love let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another love is not only an obligation it's a responsive obligation that arises out of what we've received as God has loved us above all and as we've seen it in

Jesus' death so are we to love one another and it's a continuing debt it's never paid off we've never done all the loving we have to do there's always more love that we have to give and this theme of loving is actually spreads over chapters 12 and 13 it starts in chapter 12 verse 9 love must be sincere verse 10 be devoted to one another in love and then it carries on here maybe 13 is a slight digression into the state and we've seen how the state has a particular role in justice which complements that of our important role in love I'm not saying the state has no role in love and in verses 8 to 10 Paul makes two great points about love love is the fulfilling of the law and then in verse 10 love does no harm to a neighbor now the former is much the more complex thought whoever loves others has fulfilled the law now I don't think that that means

I don't think Paul means that we can disregard the commandments he doesn't say love is the end of the law he says love is the fulfillment of the law I mean how would we know what love really was without the law how do we know it becomes undirected and emotional if we're not careful entirely a matter of the emotions John Stott puts it like this love needs law for its direction law needs love for its inspiration I'll read that again because it's brief but quite profound love needs law for its direction law needs love for its inspiration God doesn't just want us to perform lip service to the commandments to keep them outwardly he wants us to love with all the love that the spirit inspires within us so that we fulfill the commandments and fulfill them in the challenging way that Jesus unpacks them in the

Sermon on the Mount in particular but that's a very high standard of love so I think it's interesting that as well as that we have perhaps that's the sort of that's one commandment but there's also the sort of perhaps the bottom underpinning commandment is the one that appears in 10 love does no harm to a neighbor love does no harm to a neighbor we need to aim at the higher but we need at the very minimum to achieve that settle up taxes in particular pay up the continuing debt of love and finally Paul puts all his ethical teaching into the context of eternity verse 11 and do this understanding the present time the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed we have to wake up and dress up we have to wake up don't drift on we have to see

God's eternal purpose Jesus is coming our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed the night is nearly over the day is almost here C.S.

[23 : 35] Lewis put it like this we are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea we are far too easily pleased so I think that waking up is seeing what God has for us at this time of year I've reached the age where I wake up in the night to go to the loo sometimes if I wake up at certain moments in the night I see the first little bit of dawn it's probably five o'clock or something at the moment you know you suddenly see and it's still pretty dark but you know it's coming I know it's coming I know that it'll be light soon for some of you younger people you may have to wait till December to experience this but don't rush it you don't really need this experience but you do need it spiritually you need it you need the spiritual version of this that you can see that Jesus is coming that it's that he's on the way and we have to get up and we have to leave the night time world

I'm not going to go into great details on the night time world having been given a whole chapter I feel spared of too much detail but we have to leave the night time world of excessive drink and impermissible sex and get on with the daylight world we have to walk properly behave decently with propriety decorum presentability those are the sort of phrases we have in behaving decently and in order to do this we have to dress up and there are two descriptions of dressing up it's described in two ways put on the armor of light now you probably all know Ephesians 6 and you know about the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God but here it's just summarized in the armor of light we go out into a dark world and we put on the armor of light and if you were a soldier going out into

Afghanistan or something you would put on your clothes very carefully you want to be as covered as you can against anything that could happen to you well that's the idea here we put on the armor carefully we pray as we put on the armor but it's not just a mechanical thing I think the thing that makes this passage so special is it says put on the Lord Jesus Christ we make a conscious prayer that Jesus will go with us into every situation and protect us and that the character of Jesus will be what other people see when they see us we're called not to sleep but we're called into a battle and we're called to go armor on and we're called to go having put on the Lord Jesus and I find it interesting that in the middle section we had the thought about love there were two different things that it said about it it's the love as the fulfilling of the law it's the sort of positive side and love as doing no harm to one's neighbor the sort of minimum side as it were so putting on the

Lord Jesus Christ which I feel I've got a long way to go in that area and then at the bottom we have a minimum I've got to go there too as well make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires is what it says in one translation or here we've got do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh I guess that's the sort of practical thing that says well if I've got a problem with pornography then I'm very careful how I use my computer if I've got a problem with strong drink then I avoid having it in my house it's those sorts of things that we need to think about for ourselves as to what we ought to do to make no provision for the flesh to satisfy its desires so that's what excited me or struck me about

Romans 13 this morning we have to settle up we have to live as a good citizen till Jesus comes and the days of civic authorities are over we have to pay up the debt of love there's always people whom we need to speak to people who need our love we have to wake up the day will come and we have to dress up we have to keep our armor on we don't get back into our pajamas we get on and we put on the Lord Jesus Christ going with it so that he will go with us into every situation today and through the week let's pray first I'll pray and then we're going to say a prayer together father we're challenged by these words we're challenged to take a more positive view of the state and we pray that if there are some here who should be taking up that challenge as individuals we pray that they will today over the next years and months we pray for all of us that you'll give us love and Lord how we look forward to your return help us to put you on

[30 : 17] Lord Jesus and go out into the battle in the armor of light for we ask it in your name and now we say together the Advent Collect which will come up on the screen and I think it picks up I know it's unseasonal but it picks up beautifully it's based clearly on the reading that we've had and we'll all say it together let's pray Almighty God give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light now in the time of this mortal life in which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead we may rise to the life immortal through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the

Holy Ghost now and ever Amen