

ROMANS - #13

ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS

LESSON TOPIC

CHRISTIANITY SHOULD ENHANCE CITIZENSHIP

MEMORY VERSE; ROM. 13: 8. Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 12 we were instructed about many of the noble, peace-making, Christ exalting characteristics which Christians, by the grace of God, should be endowed with. The 13th chapter begins with exhortations to be subject to higher authorities and then proceeds to encourage obedient Christian living. It may appear that Paul has launched into a totally different kind of subject matter, when in reality he is only extending his emphasis on honorable Christian attributes.

Notice that chapter 12 ends with, “Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good”. Then, without further adieu, he continues in the next sentence (chapters and verses were later added) with an injunction to obey the higher powers for they are under the providence of God. Then he follows this injunction to obey and respect civil powers with further exhortations on “Practical Christian Living”. (the subject of chapter 12).

Very likely we will find this pattern of exhortations to practical Christian living to continue on into chapters 14 and 15, after which he will begin to close his letter.

The topic we have given this chapter, “CHRISTIANITY SHOULD ENHANCE CITIZENSHIP”, is a much needed reality in today’s society.

DAILY SCRIPTURES AND COMMENTS

MONDAY. ROM. 13:1-4. CIVIL LAW IS INTENDED FOR OUR GOOD.

SCRIPTURES.

V1. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. 4. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

COMMENTS.

It is a good Christian ethic to be subject to the law and those who are charged with administering it. In addition, it is also good to respect and pay due honor to the offices of state and national dignitaries who have the responsibilities of governance. Notice that I said the “offices”, which does indeed include those who occupy these offices. But it also leaves room for the fact that we are so often faced with occupants of high places that are not at all worthy of their position but rather they conduct themselves in a way which brings dishonor on the office itself.

Notwithstanding that, we should “obey the speed limit” or be prepared to face the consequences without losing your Christian character in the process. Today we are faced with “road rage”, “grocery store rage”, “ball park rage”, “difference of opinion rage” and so on all across society. In fact, we forget that as a Christian, even in times when we are on the receiving end of some “rage” against us, that we are still enjoined to be humble and reflect a wise, kindly attitude. To be sure, there is a place to draw a line in the sand and retreat no further. But we don’t have to draw the line without even the semblance of Christian amelioration.

There is one more thing from these verses to consider and that is that the administrators of these “higher powers” are referred to as “ministers of God”. Because of this there are those who think these verses are referring to the ministers of the gospel and thereby arrogate to themselves an array of powers and their execution that is totally out of order. These “ministers of God” refers to the sheriff, the FBI and duly appointed or elected officials of enforcing the laws of the land. Our minds get confused on this because so many of the enforcers of the law are also violators of it. In an age when there is so much discontent with governing bodies and their occupants, some of it well justified, it is easy just to take an “anti” approach to any laws and / or their administrators. That is not the Christian attitude. When there is justification for opposing some governing authority, it can be done with civility, without obscenities and yet with firm convictions.

TUESDAY. ROM. 13: 5-7. RESPECT AND OBEDIENCE FOR THE HIGHER POWERS.

SCRIPTURES

V5. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 6. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 7. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due: custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

COMMENTS

Continuing the instructions to obey the higher powers, that is, the civil authorities, Paul admonishes us to be subject to them. There are two good reasons for this. One is that our disobedience of the law can incur the wrath of the law and we will suffer the results. The other reason is for “conscience sake”. That is to say, we obey the higher powers so that our conscience is clear of violating the law. That clear conscience is not only toward the civil power, but more specifically toward God who has

directed us to be subject. In each level or official capacity, render unto them the due respect or obedience which their office and the law requires. Even in those cases when we have violated some law, minor or otherwise, the best way to deal with it is with respect due the situation.

WEDNESDAY. ROM. 13: 8-10. LOVE IS A DEBT YOU NEVER FINISH PAYING FOR.

SCRIPTURES

V8. Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. 9. For this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 10. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

COMMENTS.

“Owe no man anything” is a blessed way to live. But we need to understand how it should be applied. In Paul’s day it is doubtful that they had car payments or house payments. Today, most of us do. There are some whose financial circumstances are so much better than others that they have been able to pay cash for everything, including the house. I do not think that this is even referring to that. In fact, if you have a mortgage on your house and the payments are current, you don’t “owe” anything at that time. Credit is good, but it is so badly abused that it is no wonder there are so many financial problems everywhere.

Why did Paul inject this statement in his letter for Christians at Rome (and us) not to owe anything to anyone? Because he is not even talking about money, but the way we deal with each other. Specifically he is continuing the same instructions he has just given regarding our being subject to the higher powers. We “owe” our obedience and subjection, yes and our honor and respect to the “sheriff”. Be sure that you “pay” these “debts” on every occasion it is your duty to. If you “owe” the sheriff your obedience and do not render it, he has the authority to put you in jail. Paul is telling us that we should fulfill every responsibility to whomever it may be due so that we are not in their debt.

There is, however, one “debt” that we owe to all men that we will never finish paying for. That is the debt of love which is always due to others. All of the commandments of the law would not even be necessary if we pay this one debt, “to love one another”. Love is one duty a Christian has to others that the payment of it is the sure way to remove the injunctions against stealing, killing, adultery and other sins. In other words the proper love for someone will prevent you from mistreating that person. A godly kind of love and respect for everyone and every authority will keep you from doing anything that is wrong against them. Therefore love is our real debt.

THURSDAY. ROM. 13:11-12. SIEZE THE MOMENT.

SCRIPTURES

V11. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. 12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

COMMENTS

Thus far in this chapter Paul has mainly exhorted Christians to obey civil authorities since they are there to protect them from the evil that people do. He offers this as a matter of Christian conscience in their example as followers of Christ. He also offers it as a duty of respecting those who have some form of jurisdiction over them. In this light he advises that by loving others it usually removes the chance of being in conflict with these higher powers.

Now in verses 11-12 and following, he turns to the urgency of Christian living. When you read the first few words of verse 11, you can tell that Paul has not really changed directions but is connecting this thought of urgency with all else he has been saying. Otherwise it would be easy to take these verses and project them to some far-away destiny. A look at Paul's perspective will help with these verses he is writing to the Roman Christians. That perspective is one where the Gentile population of the world has only recently come into the "daylight" of the gospel. Their "nighttime" of spiritual darkness over the many past centuries has now come to an end by their being called to the gospel. And their (Gentile) salvation is, indeed, nearer; the day is at hand, and it is time for them to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Verses 13-14 will help confirm this.

FRIDAY. ROM. 13: 13-14. DON'T WALK IN RIOTING AND CHAMBERING, BUT IN CHRIST.

SCRIPTURES.

V13. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. **14.** But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

COMMENTS.

The exhortation for urgency of Christian example expressed in these verses was certainly applicable to those in Rome and their day and circumstances. Notwithstanding that, they also are applicable to all Christians of all ages. When you come to our age and consider the urgency being applied because of the approaching return of Christ, they still apply in that sense also. In other words, urgency in Christian living is always appropriate.

However, looking at the perspective Paul had again and the "new day" of Christianity and with it the call of the Gentile world from their former darkness, it gives immediate meaning to the "darkness" they were in and the "light" they have now come to. Paul tells them not to walk in rioting and drunkenness or chambering and wantonness. These are pretty strong words expressing a very vile and corrupt life style. Pagan Rome with all of her religious revelry, drunkenness, debauchery, religious celebrations which included sexual orgies and more, certainly fits this description. Paul is calling them away from this kind of living much the same as he did in ch. 12:1-2, when he exhorted

them to be renewed in their minds and not to conform to the world about them. That is still the call of Christ to his followers today, though many do not seem to think so.

Paul tells them to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, which, as believers already, they, in fact, had already done. This is similar to the expression he made about their salvation being closer than when they believed. They should put on the Lord Jesus, which they had already done and they should awake out of their sleep because their salvation was nearer than when they believed. There is a progression in this that every Christian should always be mindful of. Our salvation, which we already have, truly is nearer than when we first believed.

Let's not miss the trees for the forest here by being caught up in the timing of these exhortations and forget that what Paul is doing is the same which he has been doing in the past three chapters: calling us to a closer walk in Christ by the attributes and graces of Christian living. We won't go wrong if we put urgency on that thought.

SUMMARY

It is obvious from the emphasis in this chapter about our Christian duty to respect, uphold and be subject to "the higher powers" of civil law, that every area and function of the Christian life comes under the banner of Christian living. Otherwise you will have to take the lesson from this chapter and place it in a category of its own with no connection to what Paul has been writing in other chapters. The last verse of the chapter requires this connection to Christian living in this duty of civil obedience. That verse summarizes the lesson in the words: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof". Of all of the many "religions" of the world, both past and present, none of them can come close to bringing about a peaceful society as well as a full obedience to Christ-like living. That is what he has called us to and not to the wantonness, reveling and drunkenness of a world gone amok in total pursuit of its lusts and passions, fueled by the lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Whether Jew or Gentile or otherwise, the call to every Christian is a "high calling" to follow the example and commandments of Christ. It is disrespectful of Christ himself to allow otherwise and then try to cover it with a claim of "free grace". Grace is, indeed, free to all the world, but to accept it obligates you to a love for a life of obedience to every spirit, every attribute and every commitment of this heavenly calling. And it is urgent daily.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the "higher powers" of this chapter?
2. How should we re-act when we are in violation of a just civil law?
3. What is the connection between obeying civil law and following Christ?
4. What one attribute can we possess and manifest that will keep us from the consequences of disobeying civil law?
5. What is the one debt that you will always owe?