

In this chapter Paul explains the responsibility of Christians to obey the governmental authorities that have been placed over them, for God has ordained human government with the responsibility of restraining evil. Paul also stresses the importance that love for others has in the life of a Christian because we are not going to break God's moral law by sinning against those that we love.

---

1 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.

---

**“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers”** – “Higher powers” refers to human authorities that are over us. Those with authority are subject to authorities above them. For instance, you and I may be under the authority of a mayor, a governor, etc., and still be the authority over our children or over our employees (if we are supervisors). A governor would be under a president but the mayors of his/her state would be under his/her authority. Paul's point is that we should obey the legitimate authorities that are over us. **“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”** – The hierarchy of authority among men is something that is ordained by God. While sometimes human authorities abuse their power by oppressing those under their control, God has given them the responsibility of restraining evil in this world. God knows that human beings need a system of authority in order keep our sinful nature in check. Otherwise human society would become a “wild west” as people would do what was right in their own eyes and there would be very little law and crime would run rampant.

---

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

---

**“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God”** – To resist legitimate authority is to resist the ordinance of God and doing so is blatant rebellion against God. He is the ultimate authority and human authorities operate under His authority. **“and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation [condemnation; judgment]”** – Those that defy legitimate human authority will suffer the penalty for their crimes (fines, prison time, etc.) and ultimately judgment from God.

---

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

---

**“For rulers are not a terror [to incite fear or dread] to good works, but to the evil”** – The fact that God has ordained human authority to restrain evil is supported by the fact that the only people who need to fear authority are those who are committing evil deeds. You have nothing to worry about if you see a police car in the rear view mirror and you are obeying the speed limit.

**“Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same”** – Respect for authority and fear of the consequences of should prevent us from violating the law. We will be praised if we do good and not evil.

---

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.

---

**“For he is the minister of God to thee for good”** – Human government protects us from those who would do evil against us. Thus, law abiding citizens are grateful for the protection provided by the local government.

**“But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain”** – However, if you have broken the law, you have a reason to fear. The government ordained by God will enforce the law and punish you for your evil deeds. God did not ordain human governments to allow evil to continue but to restrain it by punishing the evil doers.

**“for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil”** – When the government punishes a criminal for his crimes, it is doing the work that God ordained that it should do. To do otherwise is to fail in the purpose that God intended.

---

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

---

The Greek word translated “conscience” refers to our ability to discern between right and wrong. We are obey the laws of the government not only because we want to avoid punishment, but also because we want to do the right thing. Not doing evil is the right thing to do, as is obeying the authorities that have been ordained by God.

---

6 For 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; honour to whom honour.

---

**“For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing”** – “Tribute” refers to taxes paid to finance the government. Since “they” (the government) are God's ministers ordained by God to preserve law and order, we ought to pay our taxes so that they can continue to attend to “this very thing” (preserving law and order).

**“Render therefore to all their dues”** – We are to do whatever our government requires of us. The only exception would be that we would have to refuse anything that would supersede or violate our allegiance to God.

**“tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom”** – We are to pay the taxes required by the government. Tribute was the taxes levied by a conquering nation, such as what Rome required of the nations within in its empire. This was the tax that the Pharisees questioned Jesus about in Matt. 22:16-22. Custom was taxes on goods, similar to our sales tax today.

**“fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour”** – We are to show respect and honor to government authorities. The person occupying a government office might be a scoundrel, but we are required to respect the office, which was ordained by God.

---

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

**“Owe no man any thing”** – Paul is not saying that borrowing money is wrong. However, if we owe a debt, we should either pay it or be in the process of paying it. We are to work toward the goal of not being indebted to anyone.

**“but to love one another”** – The one exception to “owe no man” is in the area of love because we can never pay off that debt. No matter how much we love one another, we will never reach a stage where we no longer need to love one another.

**“for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law”** – The reason we are to continually love one another is so that we will fulfill the law. We will not sin against our neighbors if we love them, and thus we will automatically be obeying 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 neighbour as thyself. 10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

Paul lists a sampling of commandments that govern our relationship with others to show that all such commandments given by God are implied by the command given in Lev. 19:18: *“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”* If we love our neighbors then we will automatically obey these laws and not sin against them.

---

11 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 armour of light.

**“And that”** – The Greek could easily be translated “And this...” Paul is saying that, in addition to “owe no man anything except love,” he is also giving us another command to follow.

**“knowing the time”** – The “time” he is referring to is the period we are currently living in where Christ could return any day.

**“that now it is high time [a designated time] to awake out of sleep”** – Knowing that Christ could return any day, this is the exact time that we should be alert and living for God. We should not be “asleep,” oblivious to the fact that Christ could return any time.

**“for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed”** – Each day that passes brings us a day closer to “our salvation” (Christ’s return). If you were saved 10 years ago, then it is now 10 years closer to the return of Christ than the day you believed on Him.

**“The night is far spent, the day is at hand”** – This period of darkness that we are now living in is nearly over and the time of Christ’s return when He will turn the spiritual darkness into daytime is almost here (in the sense that it could happen any time).

**“let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light”** – Understanding the imminence of Christ’s return, we should therefore repent of our sins (“the works of darkness”) and embrace the light of Jesus Christ. **1 John 3:2-3**

*“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”* The imagery Paul is using seems to be that of taking off dirty clothes and putting on clean ones. We discard our sinful “clothes” and then put on the “armor” of Christ, Who is the light.

---

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

**“Let us walk honestly [properly; decently], as in the day”** – Even though this world is currently in a period of “night,” we are not to live that way, engaging in the “works of darkness.” Instead, we are to live properly and decently, reflecting the daylight that will be present when Christ returns. We may be in a world of spiritual darkness but we have the light of Jesus Christ within us and we ought to live that way.

**“not in rioting [revelry] and drunkenness”** – Refers to drunken parties and the immorality associated with them.

**“not in chambering [a bed] and wantonness [unbridled lust]”** – The context indicates that “chambering” refers to going to the bedroom in order to fornicate. This covers all kinds of sexual sins typically performed in the bedroom.

**“not in strife [contention; arguing] and envying [jealousy]”** – Jealousy often leads to arguments and fighting when we see someone else getting something that we think we deserve. It makes us angry and not prone to be friendly with the person of whom we are jealous.

---

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

The three things that Paul listed in v. 13 (drunken parties, fornication, and allowing jealousy to consume us) are examples of the sins that are committed when people follow their flesh in the current time of spiritual darkness. Paul advises us to avoid situations where it will be easy to allow the flesh to fulfill its sinful desires. Continuing the metaphor of taking off and putting on clothes, Paul tells us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” allowing Christ to make us more like Him.