

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 211 – July 30th – Romans 13:1-14

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Romans

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Romans 13:1-7

Paul's argument in these verses may have been prompted by specific difficulties in the Roman church or he may have sought to lay down guiding principles for a church at the centre of the Roman world and its government. At the time when Paul was writing there was increasing unease within Judaism at the Roman occupation of Judea, unease which would eventually lead to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This may also have been reflected in tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians regarding attitudes to the power of Rome.

In context, these verses come between a section calling Christians not to resist evil or take revenge, but to leave vengeance to God, and verses which call the Christian to live by the rule of love. In Romans 13:1-7 Paul argues that God's exercise of vengeance upon the wrongdoer is, at least in part, exercised through the powers of earthly government: "One of the underlying theses that binds 12:14-21 and 13:1-7 together is therefore this: justice is served not by private vengeance but by individuals trusting the authorities to keep wickedness in check." Wright.

Dunn comments, "Paul's recognition of the need to function within the realities of this age is underlined by his heavy use of the language and categories of Hellenistic administration... Parallels with other first-century Christian writings (particularly 1 Pet 2:13-17) indicate that this policy of political prudence was widespread among the earliest Christian congregations."

Wright continues, "But did Paul not believe, and hint at several points in Romans itself, that the gospel and the rule of Jesus the Messiah, the world's true Lord, subverted the gospel and rule of Caesar, whose cult was growing fast in precisely the cities (Corinth, Ephesus, and so on) where he spent most of his time? Yes; and this is perhaps part of the point. If the gospel of Jesus, God's Son, the King who will rule the nations (1:3-4; 15:12) does indeed reveal God's justice and salvation, which put to shame the similar claims of Caesar (1:16-17; Phil 2:5-11; 3:19-21); if it is true that those who accept this gospel will themselves exercise a royal reign (5:17); and if Paul suspects that his audience in Rome are getting this message – then it is all the more important to make clear that this does not mean a holy anarchy in the present, an overrealised eschatology in which the rule of Christ has already abolished all earthly governments and magistrates. Precisely because Paul is holding out for the day when all creation will be renewed (8:1-27), when every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus (Phil 2:10-11), it is vital that the excitable little groups of Christians should not take the law into their own hands in advance. In particular (and with events in Palestine in mind), it is important that his readers do not take his covert polemic against the imperial ideology as a coded call to a Christian version of the so-called fourth philosophy. This is where Paul's probable awareness of the riots under Claudius, and the reputation that both Jews and Christians will have gained in Rome because of them, must come into play. God does not intend that Christians should become agents of anarchy, which would replace the tyranny of the officially powerful with the tyranny of the unofficially powerful. The ultimate overthrow of pagan power comes by other means, and Paul has outlined in Romans 5 and 8 what those means are. Rome could cope with ordinary revolutions. Rome could not cope, as history bears witness, with a community owing allegiance to the crucified and risen Messiah as the world's true Lord.

"In fact, reading Romans 13 against the backdrop of the extravagant claims made within the burgeoning imperial cult highlights one point in particular. According to Paul (and the Jewish tradition in which he stands) the rulers are not themselves divine; they are set up by the one God, and they owe this God allegiance. Romans 13 constitutes a severe demotion of arrogant and self-divinising rulers. It is an undermining of totalitarianism, not a reinforcement of it. By implication, if the rulers themselves are given the task of judging wicked people within their sphere of authority, they themselves will be judged by God who set them up... Government and magistrates may be more or less good or bad; but – and this is Paul's basic point – government qua government is intended by God and should in principle command submission from Christian and non-Christian alike... "This does not mean, as Paul's own example bears out, that one must be politically and socially quiescent until the great renewal of all things... Preaching and living the gospel must always be announcing and following Jesus, rather than Caesar, as the true Lord. But the eschatological balance must be kept. The church must live as a sign of the coming complete kingdom of Jesus Christ; but since that kingdom is characterised by 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,' it cannot be inaugurated in the present by chaos, violence and hatred (cf. 14:17). The methods of the Messiah himself (12:14-21) must be used in living out his kingdom within the present world, passing away though it may be."

Verse 1

Πᾶσα ψυχή ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις
ὑποτασσέσθω, οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ
θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὗσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναί εἰσιν.

ψυχη, ης f living being, person

πᾶσα ψυχη is a Hebrew idiom which may not have been understood by some Western scribes who omit the reference to ψυχη.

"In the old age of Adam, states and kingdoms are part of the social corporeality of humankind, and given the character of the old age, that includes ruler and ruled (contrast the different model of Mark 10:42–44). So long as believers yet belong to that age (as chaps. 6–8 made clear) they must live in terms of its political composition." Dunn.

ἐξουσια, ας f authority, power

Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, argues that Paul refers to invisible angelic powers that stand behind civil government. This view is now generally rejected. Dunn comments, "There is nothing therefore in the usage to support the suggestion that ἐξουσίαις here mean also angelic powers behind and acting through the political authorities." Cf. 1 Peter 2:13.

ὑπερῶ govern, rule, have power over
 ὑποτασσέσθω Verb, pres midd/pass imperat,
 3 s ὑποτασσω; pass. submit to, obey

Dunn says that this verb is the natural accompaniment to ἐξουσία and ὑπερῶ "whatever the authority in question – whether of husband (Eph 5:22 v.l.; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5 – a patriarchal society being of course assumed), of parents (Luke 2:51), of masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18; *Did.* 4.11; *Barn.* 19.7), or of secular authorities (1 Chron 29:24; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13; *1 Clem* 61.1; and here)... Given its prominence in these Christian texts, we may deduce that such counsel to disciplined acceptance of the realities of social status and of what that entailed for the social inferior was a regular part of early Christian parenesis (cf. particularly Selwyn, *1 Peter*, 419–37); and though social relationships are different today, it may well be the case that such submission is an inevitable or inescapable outworking of the Christian grace of humility (...cf. particularly Phil 2:3)." Similarly Wright says, "This is not a specific commendation of the Roman Empire as against the ruling systems of other times and places; it is a general point about civic authority."

οἶμαι Verb, pres ptc, f nom s εἶμι
 τεταγμένα Verb, perf pass ptc, f nom pl
 τασσω appoint, designate

Cf. Prov 8:15-16; Dan 4:25,35; 5:21.

"The implication ... is of an authority ordered by God, (1) subject to the limits of that ordering (cf. Matt 8:9//Luke 7:8; Acts 15:2; 22:10; *1 Clem* 20.2; 61.1–2), and (2) commensurate to the submission called for... The corollary, that those who abuse their God-given authority or call for greater submission than God has ordered will come under the judgment of God, is spelled out explicitly in the same passages (especially Wisd Sol 6:4–5; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 82.4–9), with Nebuchadnezzar a fearful warning (Dan 4:13–17, 23–25; 5:20–21); see also 4 Macc 12.11. The further corollary that a subject's submission is determined by the same God-ordained limits naturally follows (though of course Paul is hardly concerned to draw it out here) and allows a fair amount of reworking of this counsel in the light of changed political systems and conditions." Dunn.

Verse 2

ὥστε ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται.

ὥστε so that, with the result that
 ἀντιτασσομαι oppose, resist
 διαταγῆ, ἡς f decree, ordinance
 ἀνθέστηκεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s
 ἀνθίστημι resist, oppose
 ἀνθεστηκότες Verb, perf act ptc, m nom pl
 ἀνθίστημι

"The perfect participle indicates a determined and established policy: 'those who have set themselves to resist.' The words are directed more against anarchy than single-issue protest." Dunn.

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον himself, themselves
 κριμα, τος n judgement, condemnation
 λήμψονται Verb, fut midd dep indic, 3 pl
 λαμβανω

Includes the twofold thought of the punishment dispensed by the governing authorities and also the Divine judgement.

Verse 3

οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν; τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἕξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς·

ἄρχων, οντος m ruler, official
 φόβος, ου m fear
 ἀγαθος, η, ον good, useful
 κακος, η, ον evil, wrong, harm

"Whatever the abuses perpetrated on the system by corrupt rulers, this statement of principle would be widely accepted." Dunn.

θελω wish, will

φοβεομαι trans fear, be afraid
 ποίει Verb, pres act Indic 3s & imperat 2s
 ποιεω
 ἔπαινος, ου m praise, commendation,
 approval

"ἔπαινος, 'praise, approval, applause,' is a characteristic goal of Greek wisdom and philosophy and includes particularly the idea of public commendation... In 2:29 Paul displayed the same typically Jewish distrust of human praise (cf. 1 Cor 4:5), a clear reminder that the scope of his remarks here is limited and directed to a particular context (Phil 4:8 makes a similar appeal to a consensus instinct for what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and praiseworthy). Here again 1 Pet 2:14 walks in close company with our passage." Dunn.

Verse 4

θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν, ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι.

διακονος, ου m & f servant, helper,
 minister

εἰκη adv. in vain, for nothing
 μαχαιρα, ης f sword, war, violent death
 φορεω wear, hold the power of
 ἐκδικος, ου m avenger, one who punishes
 ὀργη, ης f wrath, anger
 πρασσω practice, do

The *sword* here is not merely a reference to the death penalty but encompasses judicial power and punishment generally. The powers of the civil authorities are a reflection (albeit sometimes a very distorted reflection) of the power of God himself, the Supreme Governor of all creation. Wright comments, "This is the point at which the authority *must* do what the private individual *may not* do (12:14-21) – a point regularly missed in many popular-level discussions of the judicial role of civic authority."

Verse 5

διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν,

διο therefore, for this reason
 ἀναγκη, ης f necessity
 ὑποτασσω v.1

Some Western MSS simplify the construction by reading ὑποτασσεσθε (p⁴⁶ D G it ...)

μονον adv only, alone
 συνειδησις, εως f conscience

Subjection to civil power should not be motivated simply by fear of punishment, but also from a recognition of what is right and good and as part of the Christian's subjection to God.

Verse 6

διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε, λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσιν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες.

φορος, ου m tax, tribute
 τελεω carry out; pay (taxes)
 λειτουργος, ου m servant, minister
 προσκαρτερεω devote oneself to

Verse 7

ἀπόδοτε πᾶσι τὰς ὀφειλάς, τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν.

ἀποδιδωμι render, give back, repay
 ὀφειλη, ης f debt, what is due
 τελος, ους n here = tax, revenue

It is suggested that φορος is tax or tribute, direct taxation, and that τέλος is levy or custom, indirect taxation. Tacitus tells us that there was considerable resistance in the middle 50s to paying indirect taxes, culminating in the tax revolt of AD 58.

φοβος, ου m fear
 τιμη, ης f honour, respect

Cf. Matt 22:21. Wright comments, "This last point shows once more, not least in relation to Paul's own practice in Acts, what is and is not meant. Paul was always ready to honour the office even while criticising the present holder."

Verse 8

Μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε, εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν· ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπᾶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν.

μηδεις, μηδεμια, μηδεν no one, nothing
 ὀφειλω owe, be bound or obligated

Paul plays on the idea of debt (cf. v.7) while returning to the theme of 12:9-21 – the ways in which believers should show sincere love.

ἀλληλων, ους, ους one another
 ἀγαπαω love, show love for

"This is a debt, owed to everyone, that can never be discharged." Wright.

ἕτερος, α, ον other, another

Christian love has its focus upon 'the other' not on oneself.

πληρωω fill, fulfill, accomplish

Through love, the character and purpose of God are made known.

Verse 9

τὸ γάρ· Οὐ μοιχεύσεις, Οὐ φονεύσεις, Οὐ κλέψεις, Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, καὶ εἴ τις ἕτέρα ἐντολή, ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται, ἐν τῷ· Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν.

μοιχευω commit adultery
 φονευω murder, put to death
 κλεπτω steal
 ἐπιθυμew desire, lust after, covet

Under the influence of Ex 20:15-17 and Dt 5:19-21 several textual witnesses insert οὐ ψευδομαρτυρησεις. Several other variants omit elements from the list or reorder its content.

ἐντολη, ης f command, order, instruction
 ἀνακεφαλαιοω sum up, bring together
 πλησιον neighbour, fellow man.
 σεαυτου, ης reflexive pronoun yourself

Love is not a substitute for detailed obedience to the law of God, it is the dynamic which motivates and enables such obedience. Cf. Matt 22:36-40.

Verse 10

ἡ ἀγάπη τῷ πλησίον κακὸν οὐκ ἐργάζεται· πληρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη.

κακος, η, ον evil, bad, wrong, harm
 ἐργαζομαι work, do, perform
 πληρωμα, τος n fulness, completeness, fulfilment

"Paul sketches a brief but telling picture of how the Torah is fulfilled in that love of neighbour which will bring admiration, rather than blasphemy, from the watching world (cf. 2:16-17). Here, in other words, are the 'true Jews' (see 2:28-29), those who are bringing God's light and love to the world." Wright.

Verse 11

Καὶ τοῦτο εἰδότες τὸν καιρόν, ὅτι ὥρα ἤδη ὑμᾶς ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθῆναι, νῦν γὰρ ἐγγύτερον ἡμῶν ἡ σωτηρία ἢ ὅτε ἐπιστεύσαμεν.

και τουτο introduces the summarising nature of what follows. NIV translates 'and do this.' τουτο refers to the command to love.

εἰδότες Verb, perf act ptc, m nom pl οἶδα
 know, understand
 καιρος, ου m time, season

The term καιρος is used here with eschatological implications. "Eschatology, an understanding of the times in which we live, should govern our conduct." Moo. We need to know what the time is: it's time to wake up.

Wright comments, "This is a familiar image in early Christian writing, again quite possibly going back to Jesus himself; and Paul has developed it elsewhere (1 Thess 5:1-11; see also Matt 24:42-44; 26:45; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:35-46; 21:36; Eph 5:8-16; the idea of staying awake to be about one's Christian task is also evident in Eph 6:18). This idea flows consistently from the early Christian belief that with the resurrection of Jesus God's promised new age has dawned, but that full day was yet to come (see above all 1 Cor 15:20-28). Christians therefore live in the interval between the early signs of dawn and the sunrise itself, and their behaviour must be appropriate for the day, not the night."

ὥρα, ας f hour, moment, instant, period of time

ἤδη adv now, already

ὑπνος, ου m sleep

ἐγειρω raise

ἐγγύτερον adv nearer (comparative of the adverb ἐγγυς)

σωτηρια, ας f salvation

ἢ or, than

ὅτε conj when, at which time

πιστευω believe (in), have faith (in)

This last phrase could be translated in either of the following ways:

- i) 'Now is our salvation nearer than ...'
- ii) 'Now is salvation nearer to us than ...'

Barrett prefers the second.

Wright comments that though what Paul says here is, in one sense, obvious, "in another [it] needs saying as a reminder that though to us the passage of time seems to move without much change we should not forget that the great future moment is steadily coming closer."

Verse 12

ἡ νύξ προέκοπεν, ἡ δὲ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν. ἀποβαλώμεθα οὖν τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκοτούς, ἐνδυσώμεθα δὲ τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ φωτός.

Paul weaves together two traditions: one regarding light and darkness and one concerning the 'day,' cf. 1 Thess 5:1-10.

νύξ, νυκτος f night
 προκοπτω advance, progress

Day is used in an eschatological sense, cf. 1 Cor 3:13; 1 Thess 5:4; Heb 10:25; 2 Peter 1:19.

ἤγγικεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s ἐγγίζω
 approach, draw near

The nearness is that of prophetic perspective rather than chronological calculation.

ἀποθωμεθα Verb, aor midd subj, 1 pl
ἀποτιθημι throw off, be done with, take
off (clothes)

σκοτος, ους n darkness, evil
ἐνδύσωμεθα Verb, aor midd subj, 1 pl ἐνδύω
dress; midd put on, wear
ὄπλον, ου n weapon, tool

Calvin suggests 'weapons' are mentioned here because "we are to carry on a warfare for the Lord."

φως, φωτος n light

"The day of Christ, though not yet come, is nevertheless throwing its light backwards upon the present; in that light believers must now live." Murray.

Verse 13

ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ εὐσχημόνως περιπατήσωμεν, μὴ
κώμοις καὶ μέθαις, μὴ κοίταις καὶ ἀσελείαις,
μὴ ἔριδι καὶ ζήλῳ,

εὐσχημονως properly, respectably
περιπατεω walk, walk about, live
κωμος, ου m orgy, revelry

Cf. Gal 5:19.

μεθη, ης f drunkenness
κοιτη, ης f bed; sexual impurity
ἀσελγεια, ας f sensuality, vice
ἐρις, ιδος f strife, rivalry
ζηλος, ου m, and ους n zeal, jealousy

"There are many churches where the first four sins are unheard of but the last two run riot." Wright.

Verse 14

ἀλλὰ ἐνδύσασθε τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν,
καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιεῖσθε εἰς
ἐπιθυμίαν,

ἐνδύσασθε Verb, aor midd imperat, 2 pl
ἐνδύω v.12

Some commentators (e.g. Selwyn) see a primitive catechetical code lying behind these sections in the NT which speak of 'putting off' and 'putting on' (cf. 1 Peter 2:1f; Jas 1:21; Col 3:8-12; Eph 4:22-25; Heb 12:1; 1 Peter 4:1; 1 Thess 5:8; Gal 3:27).

Compare Gal 3:27 where Paul says that the Christian *has* put on Christ in baptism. Those who have thus put on Christ must continue to be clothed in him by living in conformity with his mind and will.

"The assumption must be that he is urging them, as a regular spiritual discipline, to invoke the presence and power of Jesus as Lord of all things to be their defence against all evil, not least the evil toward which they might be lured by their own 'flesh.'" Wright.

σαρξ, σαρκος f flesh, human nature

προνοια, ας f provision, foresight
ποιεῖσθε Verb, pres midd imperat, 2 pl ποιεω
ἐπιθυμια, ας f desire, lust, passion

The 'flesh' will present its desires powerfully enough; there is no need to go half way to meet it. "There must be no loophole, no secret areas where licence is permitted, where the 'desires' of the 'flesh' are tolerated, let alone encouraged (see 7:4-6)." Wright.