

(13:1) - 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. - One thing every true believer should understand well is the necessity of submission to God's authority. God the Holy Spirit brings us to submit to His judgments concerning ourselves as sinners who deserve nothing but condemnation and death. We submit to His Word of truth in salvation by His grace in Christ and based on His righteousness alone. This submission of grace is opposed to our natural, sinful ways of thinking because when we fell in Adam, we rejected submission to God's authority. The heresy of "free will," example, is not really about whether or not sinful people make choices. We make choices every day. But if left to our own natural wills, we will not make right and good choices in matters concerning the glory of God in salvation HIS way in Christ. Man is rebellious by nature. So, the issue of "free will" is man's sinful desire to break from his Creator and declare himself independent from the sovereign will of God. By nature, man wants to master of his own fate, captain of his own soul. But God is the highest of all powers. He is sovereign in all things, to the point that He is the One **"Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"** (Eph. 1:11). It is God's purpose to save a people whom He has chosen by His free, sovereign, invincible grace based on the righteousness of Christ. He tells us that our only hope of salvation is to be brought, by His grace and power, into submission to Christ, the Lord of glory.

The point here is that God Who is Himself the highest of all powers and authority has also ordained civil governments and authorities on earth for our well-being and happiness in this life. Paul calls them **"higher powers,"** not because of their own goodness or strength, but because of the authority and power of their office as civil magistrates to enforce the laws of the land. As believers, we are to obey the **"higher powers"** as they are ordained and put in office by God. We are to be law-abiding citizens. Notice, he makes no distinction between "good" and "bad" rulers, or whether or not a magistrate is a believer. We never to follow evil men in their evil, but we are to obey the law of the land (cf. **Matt. 22:15-21**). The only exception to this is when evil men make and try to enforce laws that conflict with God's clear commandments. When Pharisees, for example, pass laws forbidding us to preach the Gospel, we obey God and not men (**Acts 5:26-29**). When Caesar passes a law commanding us to worship him instead of God, we obey God, not men. When congress or the supreme pass and try to enforce laws that are against the Word of God, we obey God, not men.

In these verses Paul is not dealing with our spiritual condition but our civil responsibilities. It was not uncommon for Christians to be accused of teaching people to rebel and rise up against civil authority. This was not the case, but if any sought to use the teachings of Christ as grounds for such rebellion against the civil authorities, Paul proves the opposite. As a general rule, if we obey the laws of the land, we avoid civil punishment, and if we break the law, we suffer civil punishment. God has ordained these governments and those who are in offices of authority. This includes all civil authorities, from the president to the police officer. We are to show them respect and honor suitable to the office and obey the lawful commands. Their power is delegated by God. It is not absolute power. So, again, if the demands of the government conflict with the law of God, then it is our duty to resist.

(13:2) - WHOSOEVER THEREFORE RESISTETH THE POWER, RESISTETH THE ORDINANCE OF GOD: AND THEY THAT RESIST SHALL RECEIVE TO THEMSELVES DAMNATION. - We may make excuses to justify resisting civil authorities. Some may argue, "But they are sinful men and women." We are all sinful people and have nothing in which to boast over them in ourselves. Others may argue, "What if they are crooked politicians and such?" We are to use all LAWFUL means to remove them from office, but we are still bound by God to obey the

laws of the land. We are not to look upon those in power personally but officially. If we disobey the just laws of the land, we disobey God Himself. Paul is not threatening them with eternal damnation. **“Damnation”** here (literally, *condemnation*) is punishment, and the punishment is civil, not eternal. Remember, we are to rejoice in hope (**Rom. 12:12**), in the certainty of eternal blessedness based on the finished work of Christ. We who believe the Gospel are never to fear eternal condemnation because we have a righteousness in Christ that answers the demands of God's justice (**Rom. 8:1, 31-39**). But we are to be law-abiding citizens, and if we break the laws of the land, we are just as liable to civil punishment as unbelievers are. Read **1 Peter 4:14-19** with this in mind.

(13:3) - 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: -- As a general rule, civil authorities are not a **“terror”** to law-abiding people. Authority is hated by law-breakers. We see this in our fall in Adam. The whole human race fell in Adam when he rejected God's sovereign authority and chose his own. This is why man by nature despises authority. Believers are to show respect for authority because it is ordained by God to restrain evil and preserve society temporally from destruction due to sin. Without it, there would be anarchy and chaos. Good works and evil works are not spoken of here in reference to spiritual and eternal things but in reference to civil government and laws that do not contradict God's laws. Our civil rules are bound by law, and those who obey the law cannot be justly punished. We have no need to fear this punishment if we obey the civil laws.

(13:4) - 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. - Those in authority are servants of God, in a civil, temporal sense for the general welfare of all here on earth. They serve God by protecting civil law keepers and punishing civil law breakers. Civil law keepers are protected. Only those who break the law should fear the punishment, and, again, this is God's will and ordination of authority in a civil sense.

(13:5) - WHEREFORE [YE] MUST NEEDS BE SUBJECT, NOT ONLY FOR WRATH, BUT ALSO FOR CONSCIENCE SAKE. - Keep the laws of the land, not only to avoid the punishment, but also **“for conscience's sake,”** from a right motive regarding the revealed will of God. Civil rebellion and anarchy are forbidden by God. We can use laws to bring about change, such as voting for or against certain laws and in the just exercise of our civil courts, but we are forbidden to use unlawful means. The only exception is when the law of man is directly opposed to the revealed law of God.

(13:6-7) - FOR FOR THIS CAUSE PAY YE TRIBUTE ALSO: FOR THEY ARE GOD'S MINISTERS, ATTENDING CONTINUALLY UPON THIS VERY THING. RENDER THEREFORE TO ALL THEIR DUES: TRIBUTE TO WHOM TRIBUTE IS DUE; CUSTOM TO WHOM CUSTOM; FEAR TO WHOM FEAR; HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR. - We are not to cheat on taxes even under what we see as bad governments. Bad governments are better than none at all. We are to pay the taxes that are necessary to maintain the government that God has ordained for our temporal good, no excuses and no justifying ourselves not doing so. Tribute is what we now call taxes, therefore, pay taxes to whom taxes are due. Customs are taxes on materials and merchandise. **“Fear”** is respect to those in official capacities, and we are to honor those in authority by virtue of their office.