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Romans

Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. Romans 13:7

Verse 7 begins with "Render therefore..." and then it lists what we are to so render based on the discussion of the preceding 6 verses. This term, "render therefore," is beautifully described by Albert Barnes -

"Christianity is not designed to break in upon the proper order of society, but rather to establish and confirm that order. It does not rudely assail existing institutions: but it comes to put them on a proper footing, to diffuse a mild and pure influence over all, and to secure "such" an influence in all the relations of life as shall tend best to promote the happiness of man and the welfare of the community."

It is we who should be the model and goal of all others within society as we live out the high calling of our Christian life. And this high calling is to render "to all their due." This, as described here, includes "taxes to whom taxes are due." Paul told us to whom we were to pay taxes and the reason for it in verse 6, and now he reiterates it here. In essence he is saying, "They are due this for the reason I explained. Now follow through with it." The word "taxes" in Greek is phoron and indicates those taxes that are imposed on people and on estates.

Next he notes "customs to whom customs" are due. The Greek here is telos. This is a tax which would be on things bought and sold and things imported and exported. When taxes like this are imposed, we are to pay them. In the modern

world, the taxes are usually already figured into the cost of an item, but there are also legal ways of getting around them, such as bartering, buying on-line, etc. Eventually though, nothing will be bought or sold without first accepting the mark of the beast (see Revelation 13:16, 17). At that time, there will be only two options.

In Luke 20:25, Jesus told us to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." If taking the mark of the beast means that we are not rendering to God His due, then a sobering choice will have to be made. Will the individual honor God and refuse the mark - thus sealing his fate in this earthly life. Or, will the individual honor "Caesar" and take the mark, thus securing temporary life and with it eternal damnation. The far better choice is to receive Jesus Christ now. By doing so, before that horrible day comes, they will be taken up at the rapture and free from facing this dilemma.

Paul's next thought is that we are to render "fear to whom fear" is due. This is referring to what he said in verses 2-4. The authorities bear the sword and therefore they are due the fear of their office. This doesn't mean they are to "be afraid" of them, but to show the fear which leads to obedience and proper submission. This thought is comparable to our duty to the Lord, as is noted again and again in Scripture. One such verse is Leviticus 19:32, "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord." The thought is not that we are to be afraid of the Lord, but that we are to fear who He is. It should be a fear in awe, not of threat.

Finally Paul notes that we are to offer "honor to whom honor" is due. This takes us back to verse 1 which noted that we are to be subject to the governing authorities. These people have been placed over us and therefore they are due the honor of the office. For example, regardless of who is in the White House, and there have been some really crummy presidents in our history, the office itself demands the honor. But, that isn't the end of who is to be honored. Peter, in his first epistle, will expand on this thought to include all people. We are to defer honor to all others and thus be humble in how we present ourselves. Here is his thought from 1 Peter 2:17, "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."

Life application: If Romans 13:1-7 have seemed like a tough challenge to you, don't feel alone. Most people find these verses difficult. However, we are instructed to be the model of society and the epitome of those who are respectful of others. At the same time, we are to be as hard as a wall of iron in tolerating sin. And so there is a balance which needs to be presented. If we live the love and don't challenge the sin, we err in tolerating that which God will not accept. However, if we live for judgment on sin without granting respect and honor, we become (and are so viewed as) self-righteous. Without the balance, we become ineffective in our Christian testimony.

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8

Although this verse is commonly used to express the concept of Christian love, this actually isn't what Paul is first and foremost speaking of. Context... The past 7 verses have spoken of the Christian's duties to the state - paying taxes, paying customs, showing fear towards those who bear the sword, and rendering honor to those whom honor are due. These are all considered debts to be paid. And so Paul now reiterates this.

"Owe no one anything" implies that we pay our debts. This cannot mean that we shouldn't acquire debt, such as in the purchase of land, a vehicle, or some other big ticket item. Even the Old Testament has provisions for buying land and the payments to be made (see Leviticus 25:13-17 for example). However, in such a debt we are to be faithful in its repayment. We are to "owe no one anything." If a loan is made, the part that is owed is the part that is due at any given time. True, the entire debt is owed, but it is spread out through a set duration so that it is not truly "owed" until that duration comes about.

We owe taxes when we buy something, not before (except maybe with healthcare, I suppose). Therefore, we are actually owing taxes at any given time. Again, Paul cannot be saying to acquire no debt at all or we could never buy

anything. Instead, he is telling us that when the debt (taxes in this instance) are due, we pay them at that time.

Honor is owed to the office of the president. Charlie Garrett may become president someday, but he is currently not in that position and so no debt of office is owed to him. However, should his day of inauguration come about, he will be owed the debt of that honor; not because he is inherently worthy of it, but because the office he holds is. And again, Paul cannot be telling us to owe no such debt in the ultimate sense, because we always owe it if we are in the United States. What he is saying is that we are to render it at the time it is due. When ushered into the presence of a crummy president, even he is to be addressed as "Mr. President."

The reason for paying our debts when they are due should be obvious. We bear a title and distinction which is higher than any other. We bear the name of Christ Jesus. We err when we -

- 1) Fail to render unto Caesar
- 2) Fail to pay our loans
- 3) Owe respect, but instead withhold it

In such instances and others like them we bring discredit upon the exalted name we bear. May it never be so!

This is why the selection process in Acts 6 is cited for a job even as menial as to "serve tables." The apostles were being bogged down because of the daily distribution and so they came together and determined to correct the matter -

"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but

we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Acts 6:3, 4

Honorable people were chosen to handle matters which demanded an honorable resolution.

After telling us to "owe no one anything" Paul now throws in one caveat which is "except to love one another." The debt of love is a debt which can never be fully paid. Unlike other debts which are paid at the time they become due, the debt of love is on-going and will never end. It will continue as long as love exists. As "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and because redeemed man will live eternally with God (John 3:16) the debt of love shall never end. It will never cease towards fellow man nor will it cease towards exalted Creator. The office of president will someday disappear, the paying of taxes will cease (thanking the Lord for that one!), but God and the people of God will always be; the debt of love shall never cease.

While in this earthly life, the debt of love is to fulfill a set requirement and purpose. It is that "he who loves another has fulfilled the law." This precept will be explained in and through the next three verses. There is a law which requires obedience and it is fulfilled in paying the debt of love.

Life application: Love is a debt. Be sure to pay it out in a continual stream of unceasing joy.

For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Romans 13:9

Paul now makes a statement similar to what Jesus said in Mark 12. He was confronted with a question concerning the law as is seen in this exchange -

"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?'"

Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'" Mark 12:28-31

Jesus showed that these are the two greatest commandments. In Matthew's account of the same incident, He went on to say, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:40

Israel was given the Ten Commandments. They came from the Lord and were engraved on two tablets of stone. The first five commandments generally deal with man's responsibility to God; the second set of five commandments by and large deal with man's responsibility to neighbor. The second set are highlighted by Paul today. When one commits adultery, they violate the marriage bond set between two people, thus harming one's fellow man.

Murder is an act committed against a fellow human being with willful intent. Accidental killing of another is considered differently under the law (see Deuteronomy 19:4-7, for example). Further, the execution of criminals for capital offenses is not considered murder. Rather, it is considered against God's wishes to let a capital crime go unpunished. But the intentional taking of another life, murder, is an utter failure to lovingly consider one's fellow man.

Next he cites the law against stealing. What a person has worked for or earned in whatever legal way is that person's private property. To willfully take what belongs to another fails to regard that person's right to his possessions. In so doing, it is showing a disregard for the life and efforts of the person who is being stolen from. This concept can and should be elevated to the wrongful taking of

assets from citizens by a government, including unfair taxation. By levying taxes in an arbitrary manner, thus favoring some over others, it demonstrates an unloving attitude towards all citizens. By taking from producers, it demonstrates a disregard for their efforts; by handing out welfare to those who can work for themselves, it demonstrates a disregard for their value as productive members of society. It is harmful and unloving.

Bearing false witness is unloving in that it is injurious to the innocent. When someone is wrongfully testified against, their rights as individuals are stripped and they become accountable for crimes they haven't committed. A good example of this from the Old Testament concerns Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. False testimony against him led to his death and his family inheritance being stolen away.

Coveting harms one's fellow man because it inevitably leads to a violation of some other commandment. Coveting the wife of another will lead to adultery. Coveting someone's personal property will lead to theft. Coveting one's position or authority will lead to false testimony against them in order to usurp them. Further, coveting in particular will inevitably violate some of the first set of commandments and thus it shows a lack of love not only for others, but for God as well.

And so Paul gives the remedy to us in order to keep from violating these, and "any other commandment" that may apply, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." No one would appreciate their own wife committing adultery against them; the thought of being murdered isn't nearly as pleasing to a murderer as killing others; where theft of others may seem trivial, the same person will feel completely violated when their property is stolen; a person who has borne false witness may shrug off the sentence of the one they bore that witness against, until they are in the same cell with them, having been falsely testified against by another; and no coveter would sleep well knowing that someone else was continuously coveting what they possessed.

In the end, when the shoe is on the other foot, none of these crimes seems pleasant. By loving others as one loves themselves, we take away such thoughts and replace them with a right attitude toward our fellow man.

Life application: When you are contemplating harming another person in some way, consider how it would be if you were so harmed. In today's wicked world, we can be small beacons of light if we simply hold fast to the words of the Bible and the faith we possess.

Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 13:10

The thoughts of loving another and harming another are contradictory. Where there is love, there will be no harm. In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the commandments mentioned in the second half of the Ten Commandments. These are directed in general towards other humans, now collectively called "a neighbor."

Each of these commandments finds its fulfillment in love. After stating those written commandments, he finished with, "and if there is any other commandment." This opens up the statement to any prescriptive directive in Scripture. We know this because the Greek includes no definite article before "law." Love then is the fulfillment of all divine law. As The People's New Testament states, "God requires nothing which is not comprehended in this word."

As "God is love" any law which stems from God will be revealed in love. One could argue against this by going back to the Old Testament and citing one of numerous laws which calls for the stoning of someone, a homosexual for example (See Leviticus 20:13). The argument could be that this is an unloving mandate of God. Incorrect.

- 1) The act violates what is determined "good" by God from the beginning of creation. A perversion of something good cannot be called "good."
- 2) For the soundness of His covenant people at large, God has forbidden acts contrary to what He has ordained in creation to keep them healthy, holy, and free from sin. Such laws are actually loving directives by God for the general good of His people.
- 3) The law was given that sin might become "exceedingly sinful" (Romans 7:13) and therefore it acts as a tutor to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). By seeing our need for freedom from this sin, and then calling on Jesus for forgiveness of that sin, the greatest demonstration of all love is witnessed; the giving of God's own Son for the sinful people of the world.

What we arrogantly (or ignorantly) claim as unloving in God is, in fact, directed towards the highest demonstration of love. Nothing God demands or determines can be unloving. By our own perverse choices, we bring wrath upon ourselves because we are acting in a nature contrary to what the all-loving Creator has determined for us. It is our actions, not God's requirements, which are unloving. He is the Creator, we are the created.

Life application: Shall we charge the Almighty with wrongdoing? May it never be so! God requires nothing of us which is not understood and obtainable in the concept of love. However, we must view all things from His perspective, not our own.

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Romans 13:11

"And do this" refers to the thoughts of the previous verses, culminating in the commandment to love one another. It is our obligation and it is all the more necessary because of "knowing the time..." He states this and takes it as an axiom that believers should in fact be aware of the time in which we live. And what is that time? It is the indeterminate span known as the church age.

This dispensation began at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 and it will end suddenly and without prior notice at some point in the future. Christ will return at the rapture for His people in "the twinkling of an eye." Because we don't know when it will happen, nor will we have time to prepare when it comes, Paul says "that now it is high time to awake out of our sleep." Being awake implies being alert and ready. Being asleep implies being not ready.

Taking this and tying it back to the previous verses, Paul is telling us to always and at all times have a loving attitude (how difficult that can be!). The imminence of the return of Christ should direct our every thought and action. Who would want to be found living in disobedience to the Lord's directive at His coming? If we look at it from this perspective, then we should endeavor to always live in a manner worthy of our high calling.

Though it has been 2000 years, and many will dismiss the Christian religion simply because things have continued unchanged for so long, to the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. Time is of no consideration from His eternal perspective. He has a plan and that plan is being worked out in a meticulous manner. When it is complete, there will be no delay. Therefore, as we live within this stream of time, we should be ever-expectant of His return "for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."

Every believer since that first day of the church age has been added as a "living stone" to that Temple which He is building. When the final stone calls out in belief, there will be no need for more stones. No architect continues to order materials for a building which has enough for its completion. And so each new person who believes brings us nearer than when every other believer first called out in faith.

Life application: There will be a moment when the building is complete. When that time comes, Christ will return for His church. Let us not be found filled with bitterness and hatred. Instead, we need to live our life in love, thus fulfilling the law we have been given. Christ could come at any moment; let us remain awake and alert.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Romans 13:12

Based on his preceding comment concerning our need to "awake out of sleep," Paul uses a set of metaphors "night" and "day" to explain that. He says "the night is far spent." The literal night equates to the darkness of the world and its spiritual corruption; a world lacking order and which is in chaos. This is seen, for example, when Jesus was confronted at night at Gethsemane -

"When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." Luke 22:53

This time of spiritual darkness is still in the world. Victory is found in Jesus, but it is not yet fully realized. That will only occur when He returns. For now, and for an indeterminate length of time, "the day is at hand." The rapture of the church and what comes after that has been imminent from the start of the church age. There is no time that a believer could rightly say, "the Lord won't come back today." Therefore, that day is always at hand. And because it is, Paul gives us a stern admonition - "Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light."

"Therefore" asks us to consider what has been said and then to act on it. "Let us cast off the works of darkness" implores us to live in spiritual light and in holiness. Time and again, the Bible refers to the light in this way. John speaks of the light contrasting the darkness in the first chapter of his gospel - "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (John 1:4, 5)

In order to "cast off darkness" one must be clothed with light. Darkness cannot overcome itself. Only when found clothed in light will the darkness flee away. This is why Paul next says to "put on the armor of light." In order to do this, one must move from the devil to Christ; from the misdeed of fallen Adam to the triumph of Jesus. He is our armor from the darkness which is found in the fallen world and

the One who can protect us from being cast into "outer darkness" when our days are complete.

Once one has put on Christ, they need to continue in Christ actively through prayer, studying His word, fellowshiping with others, etc. By doing this, we won't be unfruitful, nor will we be pulled back into the spiritually corrupt world around us.

Life application: The Bible uses many metaphors to help us understand spiritual truths. As you read the Bible, take time to think through these things - elements, types of animals, types of grain and other foods (milk and honey for example), light and darkness, etc. God uses things we understand in the natural world to show us these spiritual truths.