



ROMANS Part 117

Chapter 13:1-2

Subjection to evil government and other terrible stuff.



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Let every soul be subject to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except under God. Now those which are, have been set under God, 2 so that he who is resisting an authority has withstood God's mandate.

LAYING OFF

It's too bad about that bothersome chapter demarcation between chapters 12 and 13 of Romans. When we get rid of it (and believe me, I'm going to do it; Paul never noted the beginning or end of *any* chapter), then chapter 13 becomes what it really is: a continuation of chapter 12. When this happens—and you're going to see it happen right before your eyes—then a bit of magic transpires and the classic argument against subjection to evil authorities disappears. Here is how Romans chapter 12 ends—

To no one render evil for evil, making ideal provision in the sight of all men, 18 if possible that which comes out from yourselves. Being at peace with all mankind, 19 you are not avenging yourselves, beloved, but be giving place to His indignation, for it is written, Mine is vengeance! I will repay! the Lord is saying.

20 But "If your enemy should be hungering, give him the morsel; if he should be thirsting, give him to drink, for in doing this you will be heaping embers of fire on his head." 21 Be not conquered by evil; but conquer evil with good.

The idea here is to be at peace with all humanity, but especially with evil people—with evil people and things of every ilk. This passage even goes so far as to encourage the infliction of kindness upon one's enemies, and describes how to give evil situations and things the nonchalant glance—to shrug off foul and disturbing parade entries as they march past your lawn chair. Can you imagine how much better life could be (one iota better, to be exact) when evil becomes less panic-inducing? Opportunities abound today for the exercise of not



only tolerating evil, but making oneself somewhat comfortable as evil drags itself down the road of destruction on its own haunches.

The best evidence that the spirit of God lives within someone is that person's ability to be kind to evil people and to more or less shrug off atrocities. No one can do this apart from some measure of God's spirit. It's not as though the spirit-of-God person doesn't want to see God's vengeance enacted against wicked people, things and times, but that the vengeance is God's department and that God is on it—God will repay—and so the spirit-of-God person, relieved of responsibility for the abolition of evil (it's hard work), can then do a God-Act and be kind to treacherous individuals (kindness burns fewer calories than malevolence) and let evil situations pass by like so many lions in wheeled cages. The very act of kindness may even transform jerks and situations ahead of God's ministrations, for "a soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). Here is Proverbs 15:1-4 from the *Concordant Version of the Old Testament*—

A tender-hearted response turns away fury, yet grievous speech kindles anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowl-

edge well, yet the mouth of the stupid utters folly. The eyes of Yahweh are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good one. A healing tongue is a tree of life, yet words of subversion in it are a breaking of the spirit.

DON'T WATCH

This passage should send you off on a nice little vacation of the soul where you stop staring in shock at the world's traumas. The eyes of Yahweh are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. Why, then, should *your* eyes attempt this? Even if you could do it, it's redundancy.

And yet humanity prides itself on "being informed."

Cameras the world over capture every evil thing that occurs, and then offers it on grisly platters known as "Action News with Brenda and Bill, Weekdays at Noon." Who cares? Do you think that, in real life, Brenda and Bill are the Brenda and Bill of Channel 6 fame? In real life, these people are flakes, crybabies and scaredy cats like the rest of us. On air, however, Brenda and Bill dress up, get wound up by their crew, and off they go.

All television news people think and talk alike (they act like parrots) because they graduated from the same system,

where they learned to look slightly bemused and to speak as though caring about the words on the Teleprompter. The Teleprompter sews words together describing the horrors of the final years of Millennium 6 (“Polly want a world bank crisis?”)—and a cat rescued from a tree on Brandt Street. Brenda and Bill perform on cue. As Don Henley sings in “Dirty Laundry”—

*We got the bubble headed
Bleached blonde
Comes on at five
She can tell you 'bout the plane crash
With a gleam in her eye
It's interesting when people die
Give us dirty laundry**

The news people are parrots *and* robots. The newsroom is a cage. The news is a cracker. The parrots get programmed for just this fare at journalism school where they learn how to speak of unspeakable things while controlling their blinking. The parrots preen, but they can't even do *this* on their own; the make-up lady does it. They can't fly, either; there is no escaping the cage. Not that the parrots don't try. Not that things don't go wrong at Channel 6. Sometimes,

things go terribly wrong: a light breaks off the newsroom ceiling and crashes to the floor; someone forgets that the camera is on; a dog runs onto the set; a woman says “virginity” instead of “vicinity”—“A high pressure cell will be pushing into our virginity this evening”; the weather girl's skirt rips north and south, right along the Mississippi River. These things are glitches in the system; light in darkness; sparrows on a storm; lilies blooming in an otherwise barren field. It's why most news blooper videos earn a half million views.

We want to watch the reporters of the Falling Apart fall apart. When the Teleprompter dies and “cock” shows up for “clock”—“The biggest cock in the world has stopped working for no apparent reason, Bill”—the news people appear to go mad, turning into squirming red palmer worms starved of oxygen. They lose their virginity (it seems) and laugh uncontrollably. What *is* this? Have they been dead all this time? Oh, yes. Had they been alive, an original thought might have curtailed the breakdown. Had they been alive, an original thought might have prompted *meaning* from the Teleprompter, instead of mere consonants and vowels. Brenda might have said to Bill, “Let's ponder the *meaning* of all this evil—after Larry does Sports, of course.” But this, she cannot do. It's not in the programming.

Besides our lust for the falling apart, why do we watch? Perhaps because we have not been fully aware of, or have refused to concentrate upon, a God Whose eyes are in every place both good and evil. The omniscient eyes of God are like a fire (Revelation 19:12) that burns where it will, always intelligent. With God taking care of such nasty business as evil in such responsible, elegant ways, we can afford to be tender toward the evildoers.

Here is something new to watch for at six and eleven: tenderness. Tenderness for evil people can and will grow after concentrated periods of not *feeding* on the evil. (Knowing about evil is not the same as feeding upon it.) Try it for a week. Or for a day. A day may do it.

My sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Stith, used to say, “Silence is golden; let's be rich.” I thought that was a ridiculous saying (I was a verbose child and disturbed silence for a living), but I was only twelve years old. Now I realize that we have the right to remain silent (and the wisdom to do so) and that anything nasty that we say in the face of necessary evil can and will be held against our better sense of knowing that God is operating all things for our good and for that of the world.



* For your amusement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHimia_Fxz

SUBJECTION TO EVIL AUTHORITIES

Few people want to be subject to any authority, let alone an evil one. I have been told—even by members of the body of Christ—that we *are* to be subject to the government that is in place as long as that government remains good. But should the government turn evil, then God no longer expects us to be subject. We can then cross our arms and, if necessary, *bear* arms.

SALIVATING WATCHDOGS

What is good and what is evil? Only the potential rebels know for sure. Everyone has a different opinion. Evil to one is good to another, and vice-versa. What grates me is that the potential rebels (the government watchdogs) use Romans chapter 13 to forward their potential rebelliousness—the very section of Scripture that shuts the theory down. They go to the place that says, “For magistrates are not a fear to the good act, but

to the evil” (13:3) and say, “That’s Paul’s perspective from his fairy-tale world, but what if the magistrates become a fear to the *good* act?” What the potential rebels fail to grasp, of course, is that Paul’s was *not* a fairy-tale world (his superior authority was the infamous Nero), and that “the good act” of the context is subjection to the superiority authority, to which no authority—not even the Neroian variety—would object.

“A good government in this context defeats the purpose of being subject to evil and rendering kindness to enemies.”

I fix this problem by instructing the potential rebels and watchdogs (they watch to see whether a government becomes naughty or stays nice) to toss the artificial chapter heading, namely, Romans chapter 13, out the window. (I have no evidence that anyone has ever followed my instructions.) Should anyone, for whatever reason, follow my instructions, they would soon realize (instantly, in fact) that this so-called chapter 13 is a continuation of so-called chapter 12, and that being subject to superior authorities is merely another way, listed by Paul, to conquer evil with good. I will go so far as to say (and I do say) that the opening exhortation of so-called chapter 13 makes no sense whatsoever *unless* the government is evil. There is no possible way, in this passage, for the government to be good. A good government defeats the purpose of the context, which is being subject to evil and rendering kindness to enemies. Who needs exhorted to be subject to a *good* authority?

And so watch the magic that I am about to perform before your very eyes. Here is Romans 12:31 and 13:1, smashed up against each other as they were meant to be. I’m just as impressed with this as you are—

Be not conquered by evil; but conquer evil with good: let every soul be subject to the superior authorities.”

More death-defying tricks next week. —MZ

