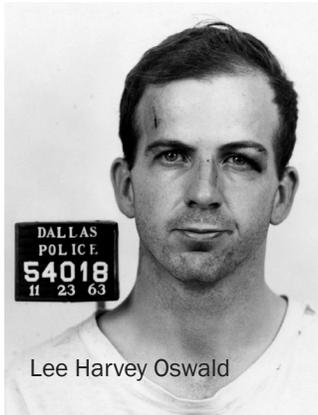




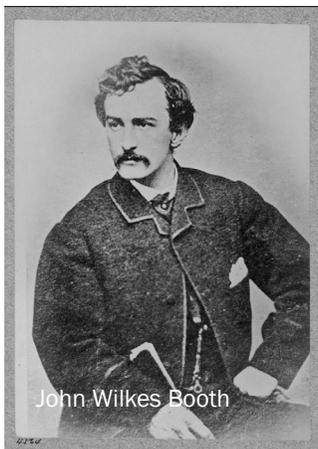
ROMANS Part 118

Chapter 13:1-3

No authority except under God.



Lee Harvey Oswald



John Wilkes Booth

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 Now those who have withstood, will be getting judgment for themselves, 3 for magistrates are not a fear to the good act, but to the evil. Now you do not want to be fearing the authority. Do good, and you will be having applause from it.

Why would anyone need exhorted to be subject to a good authority? Would anyone need convinced that God backs good rulers? Isn't God,

Himself, good? It's not too much of a stretch, then, to assume God to be behind any and all magnanimous magistrates. It's when people like Pharaoh and Nero take the

stage, however, that believers need to be told, "be subject to this guy" and "this authority has been set by God."

This passage and these exhortations presuppose an evil authority. Any other scenario clashes with the context. A kindly head of state, in this context, is patently ridiculous. Yet I am told, "We must only be subject to good authorities. If an authority becomes bad, we have the right to resist. Paul did not mean that we are to be subject to evil authorities."

This is precisely what Paul meant. It's the only thing he could have meant. Anyone resisting a superior authority, whether good or evil, is resisting God's mandate.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Daniel writes concerning kings in Daniel 2:20-21—

Blessed be the Name of Him Who is the Eloah, from the eon and unto the eon, for the wisdom and the mastery that are His. He is altering the eras and the stated times, *causing kings to pass away and causing kings to rise*, granting wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those knowing understanding.

Even Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, once so full of himself at the greatness of his Babylonian empire, eventually bowed the knee to God, recognizing through a great humbling and purging of his self-confidence that God is over all authorities, and puts whomever He will into public office—

And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, my eyes to the heavens have lifted up, and my understanding to me returns, and the Most High I have blessed, and the eonian Living One I have praised and honoured, whose dominion is a dominion eonian, and His kingdom with generation and generation; and all who are dwelling on the earth as nothing are reckoned, and according to his will He is doing among the forces of



Babylonian artifact.
British Museum, London.

the heavens and those dwelling on the earth, and there is none that do clap with his hand, and say to Him, What have You done? —*Daniel 4:34-35*

And yet, when what is perceived to be an evil authority assumes governmental reins, many today would “clap with his hand” and say to God, “What have You done?” In fact, such individuals would probably never even graduate to “What have You done?” for “What have You done?” assumes a God-installed tyrant, to which such people cannot even begin to assent. Theirs is a universe run by two powers: the good power, God, and the evil power, Satan. Indeed, people of such a dual vision see two powers (two small “g” gods, essentially), forever (literally, forever) locked in competition with one another, each with his own eternal kingdom. No wonder peace flees and voices rise among give-us-better-government advocates. Their competing deities fight tooth and nail, so why shouldn’t they?

How different such a tumultuous perspective is from the simple truth here stated by Paul that so few seem able to believe: “There is no authority except under God.” And not only that but, “Those which are have been set under

God.” Being *set* by God is much more than merely existing *under* Him. Who placed these authorities? God did. For as Nebuchadnezzar himself stated, “According to His will He is doing among the forces of the heavens and those dwelling on the earth.”

Paul verifies this in another place, writing in Ephesians 1:11, “[God] is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will.”

BE GOOD TO THE EVIL AUTHORITIES

We determined last weekend that, as chapter headings and paragraphs are uninspired, Romans 12 runs seamlessly into Romans 13. Let’s erase the chapter number again—as I did at the end of last week’s ZWTF—and watch what happens. I’m going to replace the world-famous (and uninspired) “Chapter 13” with a mere semicolon. That’s right. I, Martin Zender, am inserting a mere semi-colon at the end of the last clause of the last verse of Romans 12 (punctuation, too, is uninspired) and put the first verse of so-called Romans 13 right next to it. It is perfectly lawful for me to do this. It’s not only lawful, it’s sensible, for Paul’s thought here is uninterrupted—

“Conquer evil with good; let every soul be subject to the superior authorities.”

Do you catch the gist of it? The “good” of the first clause is the “subjection” of the second, and the “evil” of the first is the “superior authority” of the second. As a semicolon is nearly the equivalent of our “that is,” let us read: “Conquer evil with good, that is, let every soul be subject to the superior authorities.” To unite the two clauses into one, using parenthetical insertions, we would render it this way: “Conquer evil (the superior authorities) with good (be subject to them).”

Far from proving that we are to be subject to good authorities only, these verses prove the opposite.

It is common knowledge that the authorities of Paul’s day were awful. Did not Paul himself know it? Who were the religious authorities of his day? None other than Caiaphas and Annas, the men who plotted the death of the only sinless Man Who ever lived. Who were the civil authorities? History would be hard pressed to assemble two more infamous names than Pilate and Nero. Paul, carrying the otherworldly injunctions of so-called Romans 12 into the practical arena of the day’s brutal authorities, wrote, in effect:

“Be good to the evil authorities.”



“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life:
You should mind your own business and
work with your hands, just as we told you.”
—Paul; 1 Thessalonians 4:11

This harmonizes with Paul’s theme of enduring affliction, persevering in prayer, and conquering evil with good, a theme that begins in the middle of Romans 12 and extends to the seventh verse of Romans 15. An evil authority, then, would be an essential part of Paul’s exhortation. As I said at the beginning of this article, would the saints need to be exhorted to be subject to a *good* authority? What better way for the saints to display the meekness and grace of Christ than against a backdrop of evil? In fact, it’s the *only* way.

WHAT IS “CONQUERING EVIL?”

The believer seeking soulful excitement sees the words “conquering evil” and imagines him or herself a sworded warrior in his Lord’s army. We’ve all seen Joan of Arc movies; now let’s get the Scriptural perspective.

Romans 3:4—

Now let God be true, yet every man a liar, even as it is written: “That Thou shouldst be justified in Thy sayings, And shalt be conquering when Thou art being judged.”

Jesus Christ conquered evil by submitting to it. He displayed His Father’s love by dealing graciously with those who hated Him. His subsequent resurrection justified this submissive behavior, attesting to its rightness and effectiveness. It is this ideal that is set before us for imitation.

One more telling passage for this section is Romans 8:35-37—

What shall be separating us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Affliction, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? According as it is written, that, “On Thy account we are being put to death the whole day, we are reckoned as sheep for slaughter.” Nay! In all these we are more than conquering through Him Who loves us.

In this day of religious apostasy, those in affliction and distress are encouraged to pray their way out of it; persecution, famine and nakedness call for better government, not endurance; danger and sword call for owning a handgun; being “put to death the whole day, reckoned as sheep for slaughter” is simply out of vogue, if ever it was

in. But what does the apostle say of these things? How are we, as believers, to conquer these things? By fighting to eliminate them? Such is the wisdom of this age. Yet here is the wisdom of God: we conquer *in* them, through Him Who loves us. Can you see? Rather than presenting an opportunity for dissent, these things give the mature believer a black field against which to display the glorious light of the graciousness of Him Who loves us.

All be doing without murmurings and reasonings, that you may become blameless and artless, children of God, flawless, in the midst of a generation crooked and perverse among whom you are appearing as luminaries in the world —*Philippians 2:14-15*

WHAT IS “BEING SUBJECT”?

He who is resisting an authority has withstood God’s mandate. Now those who have withstood, will be getting judgment for themselves, *for* magistrates are not a fear to the good act, but to the evil....do good, and you will be having your applause from it”

—*Romans 13:2-3*

I have italicized the word “for” because it ties these two clauses together, showing us the relationship between them. What is at issue here in Romans 13, negatively speaking? Answer: *Withstanding God’s mandate by resisting an authority*. Who will be getting judgment for themselves? Answer: *Those who have withstood*. Why will a withstander be getting judgment? Answer: *Because (for) magistrates are a fear to the evil act*. Thus, the “resisting and withstanding” of verse two is the particular “evil act” of verse 3.

What is the positive aspect of the issue? Answer: *Be subject to the superior authorities*. Who will be getting applause from the authority? Answer: *The doer of the good act*. How do we know this? Answer: *Because (for) magistrates are not a fear to the good act, but to the evil*. What, again, is the evil act in view in this passage? Answer: *Withstanding God’s mandate by resisting an authority*. What, then, in this context, is its antithesis? Answer: *Being subject to the superior authorities*.

Thus, the subjection of the saints is the “good act” and the “doing good” of Romans 13:3. Likewise, the resistance of the saints is the “evil act” and the “doing evil” of Romans 13:3,4. This is further proven by Paul’s concluding remark in verse 5: “Wherefore (that is, the conclusion of all this ‘good and evil’ talk is), *it is necessary to be subject...*” If the issue in verses 3 and 4 had

been the moral judgment of the authorities rather than the subjection of the saints, the apostle might have written, “Wherefore, it is necessary to set watchdogs over the authorities, to make sure they remain morally sound, so you will know whether to be subject to them or not.” But the apostle did not write this.

Romans 13:1 (“let every soul be subject”) and 13:5 (“Wherefore, it is necessary to be subject”) are bookends that “set” the purpose of the words in-between. “Evil and good,” then, must contribute to the theme of subjection, and nothing else. They should not, in any sense, be considered a litmus test for potential resistance.

Thus, in Romans 13:3-4—

Good=subjection,
Evil=resistance
Subjection=applause
Resistance=fear.

Remember, the theme of subjection to authority in Romans 13:1-5 is subordinate to and merely an expansion of the great theme of this whole section, which begins in Romans 12:12 and finds its apex in 12:21: “Conquer evil with good.” Shall we say: “We will be subject to the authorities *until* they become evil?” No, for how would that be conquering evil with good? Evil authorities are a field on which to display the grace of Christ. Let us not submit only *until* the authorities become evil, but *because* they are evil.

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CONCLUSION: The good and evil acts of Romans 13:3-4 are not, in the context, the generalities of morality or immorality, but the specificities of submission and resistance. Thus, subjection can, and should, be rendered to all superior authorities, especially evil ones. This is in complete harmony with the preceding and proceeding texts, which emphasize enduring affliction, persevering in prayer, and doing good to enemies.

With this correct understanding, Romans 13:1-2 becomes absolute rather than relative, a timeless truth rather than a subjective contingency. It verifies and expands, rather than beclouds and nullifies, the rarest qualities of Christ.

Thank God for His precious Word which, ignored, will lead to danger and strife; heeded, it leads into the safety and peace of His presence. —MZ