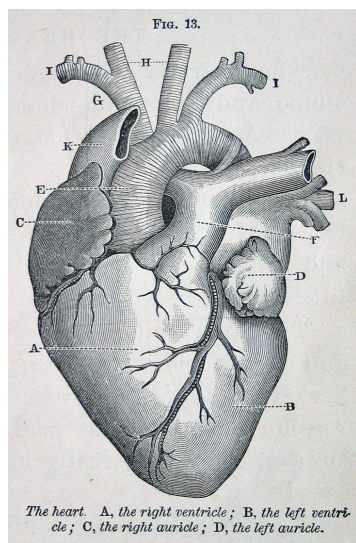




ROMANS Part 120

Chapter 13:3-8

Render the civil authority its due.



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.

4 For it is God's servant for your good. Now if you should be doing evil, fear, for not feignedly is it wearing the sword. For it is God's servant, an avenger for indig-

nation to him who is committing evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be subject, not only because of indignation, but also because of conscience.

6 For therefore you are settling taxes also, for they are God's ministers, perpetuated for this self-same thing.

7 Render to all their dues, to whom tax, tax, to whom tribute, tribute, to whom fear, fear, to whom honor, honor.

8 To no one owe anything, except to be loving one another, for he who is loving another has fulfilled law.

How in the world can an evil government be a servant for your good? It is essential to note that the authority is

God's servant for your good, not yours. I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but God brings you into straits that you would never bring upon yourself. Have you ever heard the phrase, "That guy doesn't know what's good for him"? This is you and me. If it were up to us, we would win the lottery, buy a condo in Aruba, and eat chocolate for breakfast. But God is in the business of giving us trials instead (instant oatmeal for breakfast; a one-bedroom apartment in Youngstown, Ohio) that, as we overcome them—or at least endure them—prepare us for our roles among the celestials. At the bare minimum, temporary discomforts in this life provide the necessary contrast for never-ending pleasures in the next.

GOD BRINGS YOU *PERSONAL* PEACE THROUGH THE AUTHORITY

"If you should be doing evil, fear." That is, if you should be resisting the authority—which again is the evil of the context—fear, "for not feignedly is it wearing the sword." God wants us living in personal peace. Toward this end, God raises the authority—even the evil authority—and it is "God's servant, an avenger for indignation to him who is committing evil." God says, "If you resist an evil authority in the first place, it is evidence that your investment in this life is overleveraged. You're a battle-ready bit-chomper. All it takes is a higher tax, a stupid law, a longer line at the license bureau, or a new dingbat governor, and your peace disappears. Your left ventricle explodes. *I made* that left ventricle; I'd like for it to remain whole. I care for your peace, and your organs.

"And then there's your stomach, cleverly designed by me to process pretzels and such; you're becoming ulcerated in that region by monitoring the moral status of the civil authorities; the government. You watch the news like tickertape. What do you want politicians to be? Tinkerbell? It's never going to happen. Something's always going to disappoint you.



“But if you must resist, then do it. This will become known as the School of Hard Knocks for you, in which I teach you the tough lessons of mourning inevitable failure. For indeed, I designed all human government to fail. I also call this, “Resistance 101,” and it becomes, for you, an education concerning an ill-advised and mostly futile struggle against human mediocrity; futile except for your education in it. So go ahead. Resist. Withstand. Amplify your voice through a megaphone. Some of your wrangling may be legal, some not, but your left ventricle won’t know the difference; it will explode anyway.

“See now how I do for you, in spite of you, a gigantic, God-like favor (which makes sense because I’m God)—arming the authority with a sword that it wields over you and possibly *in* you should you exercise your rebelliousness to obsessive lengths. You may think that it’s the authority’s sword, but it’s Mine. It hangs there for your good. I’m doing this for you, not to you. In My universe, all things work together for good (Romans 8:28). It’s Me arming the authority, fitting it to slash still-rational withstanders such

as yourself in order to *force* your peace. If you won’t let go voluntarily, I’ll do things *this* way.

“I inspired Paul to deliver you this news about the authorities. I want you in peace, and see how I enact my mandate for you. I make the authority resistant to resistance so that you, the irritated yet sword-shy resister, might be still and know that I am God.

“In case you still haven’t understood, withstanding the authority is withstanding Me, for I have installed the authority to accomplish My mandate (Romans 13:2), both for you and for the world.

WHAT PROTEST SIGN WOULD JESUS WRITE?

Wherefore it is necessary to be subject, not only because of indignation, but also because of conscience (Romans 13:5)

When it comes to bad government, Paul offers two reasons to be quiet and bear it: 1) indignation, 2) conscience. The less noble reason is the first. “I’ll be nice to the evil government because of that b-b-b-b-ig s-s-s-sword that looks awfully sh-sh-sh-sharp.” If this is the best you can do, Paul tips his hat. He hopes for better things but settles for this because at least the authority’s real threat settles you down. Paul wants you settled; he wants you not worried about anything (Philippians 4:6), especially not something as in-your-life as government.

The more noble reason to obey an evil authority is “because of conscience.” For this, the authority need not bear a single weapon. The conscience is that mysterious, divine gift granting us the discernment to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad, peace from war. The healthy conscience realizes that worrying over a God-wrought government offends the very One wroughting it in the first place. The healthy conscience knows that peace is good for





the heart, while war harries every nerve of the human body. Never mind the nerves; if the sword of the authority counts for anything, war with it may not be so advantageous for one's blood supply either.

The spirit-infused conscience sees how Jesus Christ calmly acquiesced to Rome, and seeks to imitate Him. Jesus Christ rode the religious hypocrites hard and wrecked their little changing tables, but deferred to the government of Caesar. Caesar, He knew, was merely enacting the will of Israel and, above that, of His Father. Most believers and those pretending to be believers read every Easter of how Christ bowed before Pilate, mute as a lamb before shearers. Before they've finished their chocolate Easter bunnies, however, they've driven the thought from their minds. The thought fails to suit their bent for moral outrage. But it comes back; a healthy conscience is stubborn that way. Any of them, therefore, acting contrary to the thought ("Christ bowed before Pilate"), do so at the risk of ignoring the very Man they claim to celebrate. Those in the realm of faith tend to ask themselves "What Would Jesus Do?"—right up until it comes time to submit to an evil authority, at which time they substitute their own name for that of Jesus.

Were the Romans evil? The Caesars were generally hedonistic, sadistic, and probably even sardonic. One thing for sure, they sharpened their swords a lot. Pilate condemned an innocent man but Jesus still said to that procurator that "he who is giving Me up to you has the greater sin" (John 19:11). Our Lord here confirmed the truth that the worst criminals among us are religious, not secular. This goes for Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and any other group cloaking its mischief in the sweet-sounding name of God. As mentioned earlier, we are beholden to civil authorities, but not to those that would hold idiotic religious or theological biases over our heads—unless, of course, God lends these theological biases civil jurisdiction. God will do this very thing in the final days of the current wicked eon, but not before withdrawing His ambassadors of peace (that's us) to heaven.

A TAXING TOPIC

For therefore you are settling taxes also, for they are God's ministers, perpetuated for this self-same thing (Romans 13:6).

Once again, it is *God's* ministers, not yours, who vex you for your money on April 15. Who wants to pay taxes? Who ever imposes a single, solitary dollar upon his or her own self? This remarkable passage insists that God Himself raises up the authorities—in order to tax *you*. Don't shoot the messenger. God not only knows how much money we need, but how much we don't need. And He has many creative/infuriating ways of removing it (our money) from us.

This truth has saved me from despair during personal financial meltdowns. We always hear that "God knows how much money we need," but I invented the above saying—the sick yet truthful saying that you have heard from me and from no one else: "God knows how much money we *don't* need, and He has many creative/infuriating ways of removing it from us." Sorry for having to repeat it. We're talking about a God kind enough to keep unnecessary income from us, income that would somehow ruin us were it placed into in *our* pockets rather than those of the national treasury. Imbibe of this. Hold your nose and swallow it. Dare to believe it, then live it. For you and for me, this is a bowing down in recognition of the sovereignty of God. Apart from this section of Romans delivered to us via the pen of Paul under inspiration of the holy spirit of God, we could never believe that the sovereignty of God could possibly extend to evil,

tax-crazy bureaucracies. And yet it does. This is why God wrote Romans, chapter 13. To help us understand it. To dictate it to us. To help us keep our peace.

GIVE IT UP

Render to all their dues, to whom tax, tax, to whom tribute, tribute, to whom fear, fear, to whom honor, honor (Romans 13:7).

Remember that the context here is that of superior authorities. If the government wants tax, give it. If the government wants *any* sum rendered in acknowledgment of its superior station (“tribute”), then render it. If the government says “fear us,” then tremble accordingly. What do you care? It’ll make the authority happy and they won’t bother you. Obedience is better than bother. It’s definitely better than being killed by the authority. The authorities are being discarded anyway (1 Corinthians 2:6), while you will soon commandeer vast swaths of Universal real estate that will make their fiefdoms look like so many anthills. So why not just do what they want? Even if a government is evil, yes, you can honor it. Christ did. He honored it not by considering it a noble, moral dominion, but by acknowledging its legitimacy and bowing to it. How could He do this? He knew the ultimate Source of the authority. Did not He, Himself, say to Pilate in the midst of His unlawful trial—

No authority have you against Me in anything, except it were given to you from above (John 19:11).

KILL ‘EM WITH KINDNESS

To no one owe anything, except to be loving one another, for he who is loving another has fulfilled law (Romans 13:8).

“Don’t owe anyone anything,” means paying the authority what it wants—monetarily, honor-wise, power-wise, any-wise, because this is all the poor authority cares about: how rich it is, how famous it is, how much power it wields over how many people. We’re of a different mentality. Let the fat pigs have their day. The spirit of God fuels *our* ruminations, greed theirs. The ruminations of worldly authorities (and most worldly people) lacks spirit; we, on the other hand, are saturated with the stuff. For them, flesh rules. It is these power-mad potentates—rich, powerful, yet profoundly stupid in things of consequence—who are being discarded (1 Corinthians 2:6). By contrast, we, in spite of our present anonymity, stand poised on the brink of eonian resurrection.

Paul calls upon us to think upon what we *shall* be, not upon what we are.

At the risk of reduncancy, I tell you again: give the authorities what they want. What need will we have of legal tender on the other side of the veil? Soon, all true wealth will be ours, and the present magistrates will be strapped for even a single coin of the heavenly realm. Their happiness is now, ours is later. We can therefore afford to render them their precious little fancies.

LOVE REMAINS

See how Paul has come full circle. He is back now to loving our enemies. This is the only thing we ought to owe anyone: love. Everything else that governments or crotchety friends think they want, need and can’t live without, give them. The one thing they consider expendable is the very thing that they need most of all: love. It’s the one thing they never get. So let us supply them what they don’t have. We may be their only chance of thinking kindly of God—of tasting of God—for they are aware that we name Him as our own.

Everyone gives to the authority through compulsion, as do we, but we add to this the “magic” ingredient mentioned above. Love sticks to the authority where nothing else does or can. Money, fame, power—these all drop away like dying leaves. Only love remains (1 Corinthians 13:8). Be seeking love.

The law said “Love your associate as yourself,” but no human can obey commandments, “for what was impossible to the law, in which it was infirm through the flesh, did God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sin’s flesh and concerning sin, He condemns sin in the flesh.” But the spirit of God that makes its home in us enacts the great law of love, not by a pounding of the stone commandments into recalcitrant brains, but through a greater “law,” the spirit of God living inside of us, in our hearts, for —

Whenever they of the nations that have no law, by nature may be doing that which the law demands, these, having no law, are a law to themselves, who are displaying the action of the law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying together and their reckonings between one another, accusing or defending them, in the day when God will be judging the hidden things of humanity, according to my evangel, through Jesus Christ (Romans 2:14-16).

—MZ (To be continued.)