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Respecting Civil Authority

13: 1-14

Respecting civil authority DIG: Why must believers be subject to the laws of the government? What is the exception to the divine command that “everyone is to obey the governing authorities?” What if a governmental official is corrupt, disreputable? What are our options as believers? Why do we pay taxes? How is God’s view of love different from the world’s view? How does our conscience work against or with governmental authority?

REFLECT: When you consider your current set of elected officials (federal, state, and local), is it easy or hard to submit yourself to their authority? If it is difficult for you, what would the Bible say is your responsibility? How do you respond to the unlovable people in your world? What motivates you to love others? What tends to prevent you from loving others? What does it mean to clothe yourselves with the Lord Yeshua the Messiah?

Although not of the world, we are still in the world; therefore, we have a responsibility to obey the governing authorities, as long as they do not ask us to violate the Word of God.



Having discussed believer’s relationships with believers and with unbelievers (**to see link [click Dd - Walking in Love](#)**), **Paul** naturally turns to how we should relate to the chief external institution, civil **authorities**. **His** advice, which can be seen as an application of **12:21, conquer evil with good**, corresponds to Judaism’s “*Dina dimalkuta dina*,” Aramaic

for “The law of the kingdom is Law,” Torah to be obeyed as if **God Himself** had commanded it. As **Yeshua** had said: **Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God (Matthew 22:21)**. Does this mean that believers should obey the wicked laws of an **evil government** – the Nazis, the Communists, or other totalitarian regimes? No, because this rule does not stand by itself in Scripture; it must be set against **Acts 5:29, We must obey God, not men**, when the will of **the state** and will of **God** conflict (see **Acts Au - The Apostles Persecuted**).³⁴³ But we must do so with respect and with the willingness to suffer whatever penalties and consequences may result.

Paul was writing to believers at the very heart of the Roman Empire. As yet, the great persecutions had not begun, but were on their way. Christianity was still considered a Jewish sect, and the Jewish religion was approved by Rome. However, the day would soon come when it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for a believer, either Jew or Gentile, to be loyal to the emperor. He or she could not drop incense on the altar and affirm, “Caesar is god!”³⁴⁴

What, then, is the believer’s responsibility to society, and to **the government** in particular, if we are to remain **aliens and temporary residents** in the world (**First Peter 2:11**), who have an obligation to call people to salvation? How are we to **live in the world but not be of the world (John 17:11 and 16)**. In the present context, Paul presents the **two basic principles** that answer those questions. **First, be subject to the government, and second, pay taxes**. It is through fulfilling those two obligations that we **give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God (Matthew 22:21)**.

First, be submitted to governing authorities: Everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, are **to obey the governing authorities (Romans 13:1a)**. While writing to believers who were **living as aliens in the Diaspora - in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia (First Peter 1:1)**, Peter said: **For the sake of the Lord, submit yourselves to every human authority - whether to the emperor as being supreme, or to governors as being sent by him to punish wrongdoers and praise those who do what is good. For it is God’s will that your doing good should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Submit as people who are free, but not letting your freedom serve as an excuse for evil; rather, submit as God’s slaves. Be respectful to all - keep loving the brotherhood, fearing God and honoring the emperor (First Peter 2:13-17)**. Peter gives no qualification of condition. Every civil authority is to be **submitted** to willingly, unless any law or command would require disobedience to **God’s Word**.

When **Pharaoh** ordered **the Jewish midwives Shifrah and Pu'ah to kill** all the **boy** babies when **they** were born, because **they were God-fearing women, they didn't do as the king of Egypt ordered and let the boys live**. Because those **women** refused to disobey **YHVH** by committing murder, **ADONAI** honored **their** civil disobedience and **prospered the midwives, and the people continued to multiply and grow very powerful**. Indeed, because the midwives feared God, **He made them founders of families (Exodus 1:17 and 20-21)**.

When four young Jewish men named **Dani'el, Hananyah, Misha'el and 'Azaryah** were commanded by King Nebuchadnezzar to **worship the golden statue** he had erected, **they said, "Your question doesn't require an answer from us. Your majesty, if our God, whom we serve, is able to save us, He will save us from the blazing hot furnace and from your power. But even if He doesn't, we want you to know, your majesty, that we will neither serve your gods nor worship the gold statue which you have set up."** Again, **Ha'Shem** blessed **their** faithfulness, to the extent that **the fire had no power on their bodies - not even their hair was singed, their clothes looked the same, and they didn't smell of fire (Dani'el 3:16-18, 27)**.

Regardless of the failures of **government** - many of them immoral, unjust, and ungodly - believers are to pray and live peaceful lives that influence the world by godly, selfless living, not by protests, sit-ins, and marches, much less rebellion. Like the prophets of the TaNaKh, we have both the right and the obligation to confront and oppose the **sins** and **evils** of our society, but only in **the Lord's** way and power, not in the world's. In this way, says **Paul**, our living is **good and valuable to the community (Titus 3:8)**, because it shows them the power of **God** in salvation. They see what a person saved from **sin** is like.³⁴⁵

Paul next presents seven reasons why believers are to submit to human government:

1. Government is by divine decree: For there is no civil authority, **Paul** declares, **that is not from God**. No matter what form it takes, no human **government** at any time in history, at any place on earth, at any level of society, has ever existed or will ever exist apart from the sovereign **authority** of **YHVH**, because all **power belongs to God (Psalm 62:11 NASB)**, and the existing authorities have been placed where they are by **God (Romans 13:1b; Dani'el 2:21 and 4:17)**. The entire world, everything in heaven and earth, including Satan and his demons, are subject to their **Creator**. **God's** sovereignty created and absolutely controls the universe, with no exceptions or limitations. Also, without exception, the **power** that any person, group, or society may possess is divinely delegated.

How well or how poorly that power is used is another matter. **Paul's** point here is that this **power** has only one source – **ADONAI!**

Yet, in **His** sovereign wisdom, **YHVH** has permitted Satan to have vast unlimited power over the world and the affairs of men. Although the Adversary was not directly responsible for mankind's **sin** at the Fall, it was his seductive enticement that led Adam and Eve to disobey **God** and thereby commit the first **sin**, a **sin** which all mankind has inherited (see **Bm - The Consequences of Adam**). The **Evil One** does not have **the power** to make us **sin**, but since that tragic day in the Garden of Eden, he has used every means at his disposal to entice us to indulge in **sinful** impulses and thereby express our defiance to **God (Ephesians 2:1-2)**.

The autocratic, ruthless, and demonic regimes of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mo Tse Tung were no exceptions to **God's** command to be subject to civil authority. The equally ruthless empires of ancient Assyria and Babylon were no exceptions. The Roman Empire, sometimes ruled by caesars who proclaimed themselves to be gods, was no exception. The apostate and heretical "Christian" kingdoms of the Middle Ages were no exceptions. Shaman-ruled primitive tribes of South America are no exceptions. *In short, there are no exceptions!*

2. Resistance to government is rebelling against God: Therefore, whoever resists the civil authorities is resisting what God has instituted (13:2a). The seriousness with which **God** takes rebellion is illustrated vividly in the book of **Numbers**. **God** had chosen **Moshe** not only to be **His** messenger of the Torah, but to be the human leader of **Isra'el** as **He** delivered her from Egypt and led her through the wilderness to the Promised Land. **YHVH** had also appointed **Moses'** brother **Aaron** to be high priest. But during that journey, a group of **250** rebels, led by **Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On, assembled themselves against Moshe and Aaron and said to them, "You take too much of yourselves! After all, the entire community is holy, every one of them, and ADONAI is among them. So why do you lift yourselves up above ADONAI's assembly" (Numbers 16:3)?**

YHVH was so angered by their rebellion **the ground under them split apart - the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households . . . then fire came out from ADONAI and destroyed the 250 men who had offered incense (Numbers 16:31-35)**. Incredibly, the people learned nothing from that awful **judgment**. Instead of drawing **them** back closer to **God**, it merely escalated **their** hatred of **His** chosen leaders. **The very next day, the whole community of the people of Isra'el complained against Moshe and Aaron, saying: You have killed ADONAI's people (Numbers 16:41)**. In response to that defiant accusation, the LORD sent a deadly plague that instantly killed **14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah (Numbers 16:49)**. Had Aaron

not intervened by making atonement for the people, the entire congregation would have been annihilated (**Numbers 16:46-48**).

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You** are more powerful than any ruler or **government**. Praise **You** that no ruler can sneak his way into a political office, but rather you are in control of who gets into each **governmental** position and how long they stay in that office. **He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, then he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff (Isaiah 40:23-24 NIV).***

3. Those who resist the government will be punished: And those who resist will bring judgment, or discipline, on themselves (13:2b). Believers can resist if **the government** asks us to act contrary to the Scriptures. The function of **government** is to punish **the evil** and protect **the good**, but when a **government** reaches a state, such as it did under Nazi Germany, where it promoted **the evil** to destroy **the good**, at that point the believer must, out of necessity, rebel against **the government**. Corrie ten Boom hid Jews in her “hiding place” even though it was against the law during World War II in the Netherlands. She was eventually arrested and sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp, a women’s labor camp in Germany. After her release, Corrie was told that it was because of a clerical error and that a week later, all the women in her age group were sent to the gas chambers.³⁴⁶

4. Government serves to restrain evil: Paul was obviously speaking in general terms when **he** said: **For rulers are no terror to good conduct, but for evil (13:3a).** He had suffered a great deal at the hands of **rulers** who abused him for no other reason than **his** godly **good conduct**. But in that day, as throughout history, even the most wicked regimes were, and are, a deterrent to murder, theft, and many other crimes. Although the fact far from justifies totalitarian **government**, the fact is that crime rates under such systems are frequently lower than those in the free world. Until recently, at least, such crimes as murder, robbery and rape were all but nonexistent in some communist countries. In Muslim nations, severe punishment has been a formidable deterrent to such crimes.

When **Adam** and **Eve sinned** by eating the forbidden fruit, **they** entered into a knowledge of **good** and **evil (Genesis 2:17 and 3:1-7)**. That knowledge has been passed down to all **their** descendants throughout history. It is that knowledge that forms the basis for conscience, even the conscience of unbelievers (see [Ar - The Warning to the “Good Person”](#)). When people **sin**, it is not because they don’t know the difference between **good**

and **evil**, but because **in their wickedness they keep suppressing the truth, because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them (1:18b-19).**

Therefore, through **God's** natural revelation in conscience, reason, and under **His** universal common grace, even the lost rulers instinctively know right from wrong, and constantly know that part of their duty is to punish **evil conduct** and to promote **good conduct**. Civil authorities also realize that basic morality is essential to basic living. No society can survive very long with excessive murder, theft, dishonesty, sexual immorality and violence. **Good conduct** is essential for any nation's self-preservation. Without it, society self-destructs.

5. Government serves to promote good: Would you like to be unafraid of the person in authority? Then simply do what is good, and you will win his approval; for the government is God's servant, there for your benefit (13:3b-4a). Generally speaking, peaceful and law-abiding citizens have been favorably treated by their **governments** throughout history. With notable exceptions, such people have been **unafraid of the person in authority**. As long as they **do what is good**, they not only will not be mistreated, but **win his approval**. Because civil **authority** represents the **God-ordained** institution of civil **government**, a civil official is actually **God's servant**, regardless of **his** beliefs about, or **his** relationship with, **ADONAI**. **He** is doing **the Lord's** work whether **he** realizes it or not.

6. Rulers are empowered by God to inflict punishment for disobedience: But, if you do what is wrong, be afraid! Because it is not for nothing that he holds the power of the sword. For he is God's servant, there as an avenger to punish wrongdoers (13:4b). **YHVH** has given the power of the sword to the government, and with it the authority to **punish**, and even to execute, **wrongdoers**. In the earliest period of human existence, **the LORD** instituted **capital** punishment: **Whoever sheds human blood, by a human being will his own blood be shed; for God made human beings in His image (Genesis 9:6).**

When a society rejects **capital** punishment for even the most serious crimes, including murder, it declares itself guilty of failing to obey **YHVH**. After **Cain** killed **Abel**, **God said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground" (Genesis 4:10)!** Like Satan, whom he unknowingly had come to serve, **Cain** was both a murderer and a liar. Immediately after the Flood, **Ha'Shem** established the divine law of **capital** punishment for murder (**Genesis 9:6**). As part of the Torah, **God** declared: **You will not defile the Land in which you are living. For blood defiles the**

Land, and in this Land no atonement can be made for the blood shed in it except the blood of him who shed it (Numbers 35:33).

Among other things, **Isra'el** was sent into the Babylonian captivity because of the many **bloody** crimes in the nation that went unpunished. **Forge a chain, for the Land is full of capital crimes and the City [of Jerusalem] full of violence. Therefore, I will bring the worst of the nations to take possession of their homes; I will end the arrogance of the strong; and their holy places will be profane (Ezeki'el 7:23-24).** When a nation does not administer justice, it eventually falls under **Ha'Shem's** justice.

Abortion is murder of unborn children, and a nation that permits, and even encourages, this ghastly execution of the most innocent and helpless of those created in **God's image** cannot possibly escape **His judgment**. The land cries out for **the blood** of millions upon millions of massacred babies. **God** will answer in **His** time.

7. Government should be submitted to for conscience's sake: Another reason to obey, besides fear of punishment, is for the sake of conscience - which for the believer, is for **the Lord's sake (13:5)**. **Peter** declares: **For the sake of the Lord, submit yourselves to every human authority - whether to the emperor as being supreme, or to governors as being sent by him to punish wrongdoers and praise those who do what is good. For it is God's will that your doing good should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people (First Peter 2:13-15).** As **God's** own children, who are indwelt by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, we should realize with spiritual instinctiveness that disobedience of and disrespect for government is wrong, whether or not those **sins** are punished, and that obedience of and respect for it are right, whether we are personally protected by it or not.³⁴⁷

Second, pay your taxes: This is also why you pay taxes; for the authorities are **God's** public officials, constantly attending to these duties. Pay everyone what he is owed: if you owe the tax-collector, pay your taxes (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Iz - Is It Right For Us to Pay Taxes to Caesar or Not?**); if you owe the revenue-collector, pay revenue; if you owe someone respect, pay him respect; if you owe someone honor, pay him honor (13:6-7). No one enjoys paying taxes. But taxes are a part of everyday life. It goes without saying that all taxes are not just. The only completely just tax system the world had ever known was in divinely-revealed taxes of ancient **Isra'el**, which amounted to about twenty-five percent a year (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Cx - Do Not Neglect the Levite**). But although their taxes were absolutely fair, the people soon discovered ways to cheat on them.

In **Isra'el**, as in most other parts of the Roman Empire, nationals of the country were

appointed (usually after paying a high fee) as **tax** collectors and were given specified amounts to collect for Rome each year. They were free to charge virtually any rate they wanted, under the protection of the Roman soldiers. Whatever they collected over the prescribed amount for Rome, they could keep for themselves. As would be expected, abuse was rampant, and because most of them were fellow countrymen, **tax** collectors were often more hated than the Roman officials and soldiers. The gospels vividly reveal how much the **tax** collector was despised in **Isra'el** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Cp - The Calling of Matthew](#)).³⁴⁸

Love fulfills the Torah: Yeshua said that all **the Torah** and **the Prophets** depended on two commandments - **loving God** (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Bw - Sh'ma Isra'el](#)), and **loving one's neighbor as oneself** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Jb - Which is the Greatest Commandment?](#)). **Paul** quotes four of **the five commandments** in the "Second Table" of **the Ten Words** (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Bk - The Ten Words](#)) that control our relationship to **a neighbor**, "**Don't commit adultery**" (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Br - Do Not Commit Adultery](#)), "**Don't murder**" (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Bq - Do Not Murder](#)), "**Don't steal**" (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Bs - Do Not Steal](#)), "**Don't covet**" (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Bu - Do Not Covet](#)). **And any others are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (13:9).** **Paul's** point here in these verses is to show that the principle of **loving one's neighbor** must underline all the rules governing Jewish life and will lead to right behavior. **For the whole Torah can be [fully obeyed] in a single saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).**

Paul had just been speaking of paying taxes, and the warning to **owe** nothing to **anyone** continues with **his** focus on the believer's financial obligations. **Don't owe anyone anything (13:8a).** Some have interpreted this to mean that a believer is never justified in going into debt of any sort. But neither the TaNaKh nor the B'rit Chadashah categorically forbids borrowing or lending. **Borrowing** and **lending** were common and legitimate practices in ancient **Isra'el** (**Exodus 22:25 Leviticus 25:35-36; Deuteronomy 15:7-9; Proverbs 19:17**). The Torah carefully regulated lending by prohibiting charging interest to those who were destitute, but it did not forbid lending with honest and reasonable interest.

When borrowing is truly necessary, the money should be repaid as agreed upon with the lender, promptly and fully. But Scripture nowhere justifies borrowing for the purpose of buying unnecessary things, especially luxuries, that cannot be afforded. And whatever is owed must be paid on time and in full. Those financial principles are the essence of **Paul's**

warning: **Don't own anyone anything.**

Then Paul makes what appears at first glance to be a radical transition, declaring that all believers have a type of perpetual indebtedness. Completely apart from financial considerations, all believers have the constant obligation **to love one another; for whoever loves his fellow human being has fulfilled Torah (13:8b)**. It is a debt we are constantly to pay against, but can never pay off. The early church Father, Origen said, "The debt of **love** remains with us permanently and never leaves us. This is a debt which we pay every day and will forever owe." And by our **Lord's** gracious provision, it is a debt we will always have the resources to pay and which, the more we pay toward it, the more willing and joyous the payment will be.³⁴⁹



Clothe yourselves with the Lord Yeshua Messiah: Following **his** declaration that godly **love fulfills the Torah**, Paul next focuses on the urgency of believers to **be conformed to the image Yeshua Messiah (8:29)**, who is **Himself**, the source and power of that divinely-required **love**. We are to **clothe ourselves with the Lord Yeshua the Messiah (13:14a)**. That phrase summarizes our sanctification (see [Db - The Mercies of ADONAI](#)), the continual spiritual growth of those who have become **the children of God** through **faith in His Son, Yeshua Messiah**. The faithful, obedient, loving believer grows spiritually by becoming increasingly like **Yeshua**. As we **clothe ourselves in Messiah, His** righteousness, truth, holiness, and love become more and more evident in our own lives. **His** character becomes reflected in us.

Besides all this, you know at what point of history we stand; so, it is high time for you to rouse yourselves from sleep; for the final deliverance is nearer than when we first came to trust (13:11). The **time** is limited, the opportunity is brief. The time to listen and obey is now! There is no time for apathy, complacency, or indifference. **Jewish writings of at that time too regarded the final deliverance as imminent. "In those**

days the Elect One will arise and choose the righteous and holy from among them, because the day for their being saved has come near” (Enoch 51:1b-2). And, “For truly my redemption has drawn near; it is not far off as it was before” (Second Baruch 23:7). This is our motivation for living out the life of a believer consistently. **The night is almost over**, as each day passes, **the day of our redemption is almost here.**³⁵⁰

Night and **day**, also **darkness** and **light**, as metaphors for **evil** and **good** are found in the Gospel of **John**: **I am the light of the world; whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light which gives light** (John 8:12), and in the TaNaKh: **Arise, shine [Yerushalayim], for your light has come, the glory of ADONAI has risen over you. For although darkness covers the earth and thick darkness the peoples; on you ADONAI will rise; over you will be seen His glory. Nations will go toward Your light and kings toward Your splendor** (Isaiah 60:1-3). **The Essenes, who separated themselves from what they considered the decadent and immoral life fostered by the rabbinic Judaism of their day, pictured themselves as the sons of light in a holy war against the sons of darkness.**

Negatively, let us put aside the deeds of darkness and arm ourselves with the weapons of light. Let us live properly, as people do in the daytime - not partying and getting drunk, not engaging in sexual immorality and other excesses, not quarrelling and being jealous. Positively, clothe yourselves with the Lord Yeshua the Messiah (Isaiah 61:10; Galatians 3:27); and don't waste your time thinking about how to provide for the sinful desires of your old nature (13:12-14). Every generation has had its share of skeptics who ask: **Where is this promised “coming” of His? For our fathers have died, and everything goes on just as it has since the beginning of creation** (Second Peter 3:4). No believer who honestly holds God's Word to be inerrant could think **Paul** and **Peter** were simply overanxious about the imminence of **Messiah's Second Coming**. The majority of believers throughout Church history have lived their lives expecting **the Lord's the final deliverance is near.**³⁵¹

*So, Lord God Almighty, the Lord of the angelic armies of Heaven, we come before You now covered by the blood of Yeshua, we and our families. We proclaim over the worldwide systems of evil seeking to take control: Let the occult shields of **protection** be taken away from everyone involved in theft, fraud, and corruption. May their occult shields of **protection** no longer be able to hide them from being exposed by the light. Let witchcraft manipulation be brought to an end. As Joshua and Caleb proclaimed to the Hebrews intimidated by the giants, we say to all who are intimidated by today's giants: **Their protection is gone . . . Their protection is gone . . . Their protection is gone . .***

*. but **the Lord** is with us. **Don't rebel against ADONAI, and don't be afraid of the people of the land. They will be food for us. The protection over them is gone. ADONAI is with us! Do not fear them (Numbers 14:9).** We say this day that their occult shields of **protection** are stripped away from them and can no longer hide their evil. We proclaim this in the mighty Name of **Yeshua**.*