The Book of Romans

Chapter 13

 This short little chapter will give us some rules for living as first, citizens here on earth as well as citizens in Heaven. Which overrules the other? How can I conduct myself when I know that Human rule seems to preclude all I have learned of righteous living? This can be a bit controversial for today in the fact of so much corruption in the world’s governments going on today.

 A] Romans 13: 1 through 7; (read)

 1] "*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."*

 Does that make sense? Friends, this is a controversial and confusing passage, and written area we are getting into. So, we need to look into this set of verses carefully, noting the era they were written for and if they still are valid today. What does leadership consist of?

 God is the ultimate authority throughout the universe, is He not? So, in understanding this, we must assume that with God in His heaven, He will appoint, through His creation, authorities who will administrate His will throughout His creation. You follow? How do things ever get done without someone who can direct the path to follow? In other words, if no one stands to say, "This must be done, or that must be done" nothing will ever get done. We will each just stand and look at each other with a blank stare.

 Therefore, God has ordained those who He has gifted with the ability to administrate or govern. Note! He does not necessarily select or place a certain person to be in control, all He has done is ordain the position, and gifted people to fill those positions. Now we know that a good administrator delegates responsibility to those under him who in turn delegate to those under them, and so on. So the top administrator does not see to the day to day activity that goes on below, he looks at the bottom line, doesn't he? Now let me clarify a bit, because we also see that too many top administrators seem to be out of position or like to micro-manage for themselves, or become dictatorial in their rule, or become just plain evil.

 But who does see to the world positions and governments on earth? Satan of course, and we know that Satan is influential in all decisions made on earth, but never fear, God is still in control. What does this all mean? We know that seeming all governments are corrupt to a point, some way more than others; and we also know that this corruption runs rampant throughout the lives of the citizenry of the world. We are all trying to get a paw up on life by any means available. (Friends I say this in generalities here)

 So, with this in mind, how do we relate to Paul's statement? Because God has ordained all authority, we should be subject to it, because He says so, not Paul. Yes, most authority probably is corrupt, but rebelling against authority is not a Christian witness, and in the long run leads to anarchy, or the present authority removing Christianity from their books, which we now see happening. HOWEVER!!! In studying through Isaiah, and watching the Israelites go down to their enemies, and the people of Judah, be destroyed by the Babylonians, God did make an interesting observation: Those who were righteous, did not speak up to their brothers with warnings that these disasters could be diverted. So there is a time that the Christian should stand up for their faith.

 2] "*Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves, for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil."*

 With this said, we should put ourselves in Paul's sneakers and see the what the conditions of the time were. The Jewish leadership was corrupt, the Roman leadership was overtly corrupt and any action whether tacit or overt was going to be dealt with, swiftly and with lethal intentions. And, my guess would be, that this being an open letter, where anybody might be able to read this, Paul softens the blow by placating words. Frankly we have this problem today, but we have a ballot box to change the course of leadership, which frankly, the Christian community seems loathe to use. Around the world, many people do not have a ballot box, or have one that is rigged.

 Many people do not have the power to fight the system, so should they submit to the reigning authority or move out or underground? I have seen this through the history books, and through friends who are missionaries throughout the world and the obstacles they and the Christians around them face.

 3] "*Do you want to be unafraid of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid. For he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."*

 Now here, Paul is puffing air into the bun, I think. But the central thought is, Roman law was to punish all those who did wrong against that law. So if you do what is expected by Roman law, you have nothing to fear. As in Jewish Law, if you broke any part of the Law either by dietary, personal or government, you had a lot to fear. And even today you should drive the speed limit for fear you will receive a ticket. The big difference between the Roman authorities and the Jewish authorities, is they were not voted in, but were dictatorial. At least today you can vote the offending authorities out in most cases.

 And as for authorities being God's minister, only in the fact he is the authority, and was ordained with the power to administer justice. Now Paul is speaking regarding the Roman authority. I will not be the expert on these passages, really above my pay-grade, but we know Paul never did resist the false accusations hurled against him, and took his beatings and imprisonments without fighting back. AS did his followers, and the same with Jesus and all the disciples. They took their punishments and their deaths, as part of the live of the Christians, that no outsider could accuse them of any sort of illicit activity. Can you or I make that statement?

 4] "*Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’s sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: Taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."*

 Are we having fun yet? So, we must be subject not because of the engendered wrath, (as long as we behave, we should not fear the wrath) but we subject ourselves because we want to live in peace with all others. Governments do good things for the people like build and maintain roads, public water and sewers and handle utilities, provide and maintain protection and order for the public, and these need to be operated and maintained by the authorities, and taxes are needed to pay for these things.

 Now Paul gets into the dirty detail here, tributes. You have to pay your taxes. Whether taxes on income, taxes of goods. "But they waste my taxes on things frivolous, or things dangerous." Yep, but you voted them in there. Or, you don't want to wind up in jail, or in their case, under bondage. That authority is there, you cannot fight what God has ordained. As for the fear and honor statement, you should not so much fear as have a healthy respect for the local authorities and honor for those to whom honor is due. Dr McGee tells of a time when he was in the army and of course you have to salute the officers who are over the enlisted, and although he had little respect for some of the officers, he did have to respect the uniform, or the office they held.

 B] Romans 13: 8 through 10; (read)

 1] "*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."*

 Paul now switches gears from our responsibilities as citizens, to our responsibilities to those around us. The first thing is, don't put yourself in debt to a friend, and when you have love for the folks around you, they are your friends, so you don't have obligations to hinder that friendship.

 Now what I also see here is personal responsibility. Simple things like needing to borrow a lawn mower. Did you take it back? Or your friend’s hammer. Was it returned to his toolbox? These are little things that can wreck a friendship just because you couldn't return the item. The responsible thing to do is go and get your own. It is wonderful to share what you have with each other, that is family. So you can share tools, recipes, food items, but sharing is different from borrowing. If there is a need, can we see to it without putting strings on that help?

 There is that old Beatles song, "Love, Love, Love" and the word 'love' became the mantra of the 60's and 70's, as the ‘love’ generation rose from the ashes of the Viet Nam war, but this was a reaction to something unpleasant, and the reality was, did it have any impact? Very little except to show the world how beautifully they could write the word with all those flourishes and colors. Paul talks about an ACT. It is what a Christian should do, and why? Because that 'love' (agape) is from God. It is as much an action as it is a feeling. The Beatles 'love' was just a word put to a tune.

 Now the law referred to was the mosaic law which reinforced the commandment to love one another, so are we still under the law? Absolutely in regards to ‘love’, and of course the Commandments. And as some of the old scholars have noted is should be one’s obligation or duty, but frankly I say, if you are a Christian shouldn't this be almost automatic? Do we not have the Holy Spirit within us, and shouldn’t that automatically place within us the Agape love of God? Not a debt or duty, but it is who you are in Christ.

 2] "*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 are any other commandments they are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

 I found a couple of writers trying to take each commandment out of context to this verse, Dr McGee included, but what I see here is, first: take the last statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," That means with that agape love of God within you, you not only love them, you respect them and theirs. We all know the consequences of breaking those commandments, and truly, if I am a child of God, born and adopted into His Holy Family, how on earth can I break any of those commandments with the Holy Spirit within me? What Paul is trying to do is bring a sense of Holy Unity to the whole of the Christian movement.

 3] "*Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law."*

 Concluding the thought from the last verse; second: Love does not harm anybody. If anything it is healing of the body and spirit, don't you think? My take then, is, love is the fulfillment of what the Law required. Love is the fulfillment of God working in and through me making of me a new person in Christ. God being the initiator of the Law, He is the Law and with the Law being based on God's agape love, therefore we are then fulfilling what God has given you. And when you get the community all on the same page, you have family.

 I see this happening. Paul, understanding the nature of the obstacles that face these new in Christ, is striving to completely unite both the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians under one banner in Christian agape love that will encourage them during the various purges sure to come their way. As long as they stay separated they are easier pickings for Satan.

 Now before we go on, I shall endeavor to pontificate a might---as soon as I study up on the word 'pontificate'.

 What we are seeing today is a lot of Christian divisions, and very little unity. Too many so-called Christian denominations are capitulating to the world. They have lost their first love, and lost the faith of their convictions. With this in mind, we are now seeing the world closing in on the real Christian community striving to force the agape love from their midst. There is in America a real pressure to make the Christian change his message, and in many parts of the world, to convert to a different faith altogether. With death as the inspiring point. We must stand firmer than ever before in the face of this pressure, love each other with that Agape love, and with this thought in mind let's look at the next few verses.

 C] Romans 13: 11 through 14; (read)

 1] "*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."*

 To do this refers back to what Paul just mentioned about owing no one but loving the brothers. To be unified in that love. So why are we doing this? The urgency of time. Paul, John and the other Apostles were aware that Jesus would return, and their belief was it would happen soon. So, they spoke of getting ready, as the maidens preparing their lampstands.

 Therefore, we must be about the Father's business, taking the Gospel to all the world, and strengthening ourselves against the trials sure to come. The Christian today has become lethargic, and lazy. We have fallen asleep over our tasks. Our noses have fallen into the work we are working on. Do you know what I mean folks? If something promised doesn't happen with a specific time span, our attention turns to other pursuits.

 Now to understand the remainder of the verse, we are saved, but what we are saved for is what is coming. There is an appointed time, but it IS the Lord's time, not ours. The Christians in Rome were to be unified, and in a 'Kum By Yah ' state of mind. Working and ministering to each other and supporting each other.

 2] "*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."*

 We have been asleep in our beds but soon the day dawns and we have to get up. This fledgling Christian movement is taking root and there is work ahead of us. But Paul uses this reference of the 'works of darkness' as who we were before Christ, and the world that tries to hold us in. The reference of the 'armor of light' brings the picture of the armor being the Gospel of Truth which, as John so often like to portray, is light. Hence the 'armor of light'.

 So let's all of get up! Grab our flashlights and turn on the beams. In other words, become the witness for the Gospel, as you should be doing.

 3] "*Let us walk properly as in the day, and not revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."*

 Notice Paul includes himself here as in partnering with these Christians he has not yet met. Continuing on with my illustrative mention above, with our flashlights we see the filth of life around us, so are able to walk past the rot and degeneration we see and walk out of the mess and along the way we can lead others because of the light, they too can see the filth and look to be released.

 4] "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the flesh, to fulfill it's lusts."*

 Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. Remember John 1;1 and as we learned above the armor of light is the Gospel of Truth and Jesus is that Truth and the Light. When we put on that armor there is no room for the underwear of the world. The briefs and tee shirts are cast aside for the Lord's clothing. In other words, Paul says get away from the world and the worldly lusts of flesh and mind.