

13:1 Authority Instituted by God

God Will Judge Those Who Abuse Authority.

Origen: What does Paul mean when he says that “there is no authority except from God?” Is an authority which persecutes the children of God, which attacks the faith and which undermines our religion, from God? We shall answer this briefly. Nobody will deny that our senses—sight, sound and thought—are given to us by God. But although we get them from God, what we do with them is up to us.... God will judge us righteously for having abused what he gave us to use for good. Likewise, God’s judgment against the authorities will be just, if they have used the powers they have received according to their own ungodliness and not according to the laws of God. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.¹

No Ruler Saved by Power.

Basil: The ruler is saved not through much power but through divine grace. Exegetic Homilies 15.9.⁶

Be Subject to the Governing Authorities.

Chrysostom: Paul has a good deal to say on this matter in his other epistles also, placing subjects under their rulers in the same way that household servants are under their masters. He does this to show that Christ did not introduce his laws for the purpose of undermining the state but rather so that it should be better governed.

He does not speak about individual rulers but about the principle of authority itself. For that there should be rulers and ruled and that things should not just lapse into anarchy, with the people swaying like waves from one extreme to the other, is the work of God’s wisdom. Homilies on Romans 23.⁸

No Secular Authority over Faith.

Augustine: Most rightly, Paul warns against anyone who is puffed up with pride by the fact that he has been called by his Lord into freedom and become a Christian, and therefore thinks that he does not have to keep the status given to him in the course of this life or submit to the higher powers to whom the government of temporal things has been confided for a time. For because we are made of soul and body and as long as we are in this life we make use of temporal things as a means of living this life, it is fitting that, as far as this life is concerned, we be subject to the authorities, i.e., to the people who with some recognition administer human affairs. But as far as the spiritual side is concerned, in which we believe in

God and are called into his kingdom, it is not right for us to be subject to any man who seeks to overturn in us the very thing which God has been pleased to grant us so that we might obtain eternal life.

So if anyone thinks that because he is a Christian he does not have to pay taxes or tribute nor show the proper respect to the authorities who take care of these things, he is in very great error. Likewise, if anyone thinks that he ought to submit to the point where he accepts that someone who is his superior in temporal affairs should have authority even over his faith, he falls into an even greater error. But the balance which the Lord himself prescribed is to be maintained: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's but unto God the things which are God's." 9 For although we are called into that kingdom where there will be no power of this world, nevertheless, while we are on the way there and until we have reached that state where every principality and power will be destroyed, let us put up with our condition for the sake of human affairs, doing nothing falsely and in this very thing obeying God, who commands us to do it, rather than men. Augustine on Romans 72.10

13:2 Resisting Authority Incurs Judgment

Not Applicable to Persecutors of the Faith.

Origen: This injunction does not apply in the case of authorities who persecute the faith. It only applies to those who are going about their proper business. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.13

The Obedience of Subjects.

Basil: True and perfect obedience of subjects to their superior is shown not only by their refraining from every untoward action in accordance with his advice but also by their not doing even what is approved without his consent. An Ascetical Discourse.14

Combating the Reputation of Subversiveness.

Chrysostom: In saying this, Paul was more likely to draw civil governors who were unbelievers to accept the Christian faith and to persuade believers to obey them. For it was commonly rumored in those days that the apostles were guilty of plotting sedition and revolution, aiming in all that they did and said at the subversion of the received institutions. However, when we see that Christ's command is that we should obey the authorities, all rumors of this kind will be shown to be false. Homilies on Romans 22.16

13:3 Rulers to Enforce Good Conduct

Insofar As a Divine Command Not Violated.

Basil: It is right to submit to higher authority whenever a command of God is not violated thereby. The
Morals 79.1.20

Praise Comes from God, Not Authorities.

Augustine: This can upset some people, when they think that Christians have often suffered persecution by these authorities. They say: "Were these Christians not doing good, since not only did the authorities not praise them, they punished and killed them!" The apostle's words must be carefully considered. He does not say: "Do what is good and the authorities will praise you," but: "Do what is good and you will have praise from him." Whether someone in authority approves what you do or persecutes you, "you will have praise from him," either when you win it by your obedience to God or when you earn your crown by persecution. Augustine on Romans 73.22

13:4 Rulers as Servants of God

The Human Judge Acts as God's Servant for Your Good.

Origen: In what sense is a judge in this world the servant of God? ... It seems to me that this question is answered by that passage in the Acts of the Apostles where the decision was taken to impose only certain ritual obligations on Gentile believers. ²⁵ They were told to abstain from eating what had been sacrificed to idols, from blood and from fornication, but nothing was said about murder, adultery, theft, homosexuality or other crimes which are punished by both divine and human laws. Now if what was explicitly forbidden to the Gentiles was all they had to do, then it would seem as if these other things were all right. But look at how the Holy Spirit has organized everything. Because these other crimes are already punished by secular laws, it seemed superfluous to add a divine prohibition as well. All that he decreed concerned matters which seemed right from the divine point of view but which were not covered by human laws. It is in this way that a human judge acts as a servant of God. For God wants these crimes to be punished by human judges and not by representatives of the church. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.²⁶

Making Virtue Easier.

Chrysostom: The civil power makes virtue easier for the Christian by chastising the wicked, by benefiting and honoring the good and by working together with the will of God. For this reason he is even given the name of “God’s servant.” ... Even when he administers punishment, it is God’s will that he is carrying out. Homilies on Romans 22.28

For Your Good.

Augustine: When Paul says: “He is God’s servant for your good,” though it be for his own evil, this should be understood in the same way as the above. Augustine on Romans 73.29

13:5 *Subject for the Sake of Conscience*

Punishment for Crimes.

Origen: Paul tells the church not to do anything against the princes and powers of this world so that it may live in peace and quiet. For if the church rebels ... then it will be punished, not because of its faith but because of its crimes, and instead of dying for a worthy cause people will die for an unworthy one. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.33

Avoid God’s Wrath.

Chrysostom: What is the meaning of “not only to avoid God’s wrath”? It means not only because you resist God by not being subject, nor only because you are bringing great evils on yourself both from God and from the ruler, but also because the ruler is a benefactor to you in things of the utmost importance, because he brings you peace and the blessings of civil institutions. States receive countless blessings through these authorities, and if they were taken away, everything would go to pieces. Homilies on Romans 22.35

For the Sake of Conscience.

Augustine: This is helpful for understanding that because of this life we must be subject and not offer resistance if anyone wants to take something from us, if it is in his power to do so, because authority has been given to him over temporal things, which will pass away. We are not to be subject in those good things which remain forever but only in the needs of this age.

But when he says “one must be subject,” lest anyone submit to the authorities halfheartedly and not from pure love, Paul adds: “not only to avoid ... wrath but also for the sake of conscience.” That is to say, you should not submit simply to avoid the authority’s anger, which can be done by pretense, but so that you might be assured in your conscience that you are doing this out of love for him. For you submit at your Lord’s command. Augustine on Romans 74.³⁶

13:6 *Paying Taxes*

Bearing Witness Through Taxes to the Benefits of Civil Order.

Chrysostom: Paul is saying here that we bear witness to the benefits which the ruler gives us by paying him a salary. The taxation system may seem to be burdensome and annoying, but Paul turns it into proof that rulers care for their people. Why, after all, do we pay taxes to the emperor? Is it not because he provides for us? We would not have paid it in the first place if we did not know that we are the ones who benefit from this government. It was for this reason that the men of old agreed that rulers should be maintained by the people, because they neglect their own affairs in order to devote themselves entirely to the public welfare, spending all their energy in order to protect us. Homilies on Romans 22.⁴⁰

13:7 *Paying What is Due*

Taxes to Whom Taxes Are Due.

Origen: The authorities demand taxes on our property and revenue from our business transactions. What can I say? Jesus Christ himself was obliged to pay taxes, not because he owed anything but so as not to cause scandal. ⁴⁵ If he who owed nothing to Caesar and who had every right to refuse to pay taxes nevertheless agreed to pay them, who are we to refuse to do so? Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.⁴⁶

Respect to Whom Respect Is Due.

Chrysostom: Paul urges the people to give their rulers not only money but honor and fear as well. Fear in this context means very great honor, not the kind of fear which comes from a bad conscience. Homilies on Romans 22.⁴⁸

13:8 *Owe Only a Debt of Love*

Sin as Debt.

Origen: In many cases debt is equivalent to sin. Paul therefore wants us to owe nothing on account of sin and to steer clear of debts of this kind, retaining only the debt which springs from love, which we ought to be repaying every day. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.¹

Fulfill the Law.

Chrysostom: Love is a debt which you owe to your brother because of your spiritual relationship to him.... If love departs from us, the whole body is torn in pieces. Therefore love your brother, for if you can fulfill the law by befriending him, then the benefit you receive puts you in his debt. Homilies on Romans 22.⁴

Charity Accomplishes What Fear Could Not Do.

Augustine: Paul shows that the fulfillment of the law is found in love, i.e., in charity. Thus also the Lord says that the whole law and prophets depend on these two precepts, the love of God and neighbor. ⁵ So he who came to fulfill the law gave love through the Holy Spirit, so that charity might accomplish what fear could not. Augustine on Romans 75.⁶

Loving the Pattern of Righteousness in the Person.

Augustine: The only way of cleaving to that pattern ⁷ is by love. If we love another whom we believe to be righteous, we cannot but love the pattern itself, which shows us what the righteous soul is, in order that we too may become righteous. Indeed, if we did not love the image of God in him, we would have no love for the person, since our love for him is based on the pattern. Yet so long as we ourselves are not righteous, our love of the pattern is not enough to make us righteous. The Trinity 8.9.⁸

13:9 *Loving One's Neighbor*

The Relation of Love and Law.

Origen: If you love somebody, you will not kill him. Nor will you commit adultery, steal from him or bear false witness against him. It is the same with all the other commands of the law: love ensures that they are kept. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.¹¹

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself.

Chrysostom: The beginning and the end of virtue is love.... But Paul is not looking merely for love; he wants it to be an intense love. For he does not say merely: "Love your neighbor," but adds: "as yourself." Christ himself said that the law and the prophets hang upon this. ¹³ Homilies on Romans 22.¹⁴

Chrysostom: Note that love has two excellent qualities: it abstains from evil and does good deeds. Homilies on Romans 22.¹⁵

The Law Written on the Heart.

Augustine: This law is not written on tables of stone but is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. ¹⁶ The Spirit and the Letter 9.¹⁵.¹⁷

God's Love Poured Out on the Neighbor.

Augustine: No one loves his neighbor unless he loves God, and by loving him as himself, to the limit of his ability, he pours out his love on him so that he too may love God. But if he does not love God, he loves neither himself nor his neighbor. Letter 20.¹⁸

13:10 *Love Fulfills the Law*

The Rule of Love.

Augustine: The rule of love is that one should wish his friend to have all the good things he wants to have himself and should not wish the evils to befall his friend which he wishes to avoid himself. ²⁴ He shows this benevolence to all men. No evil must be done to any. Love of one's neighbor works no evil. Let us then love even our enemies as we are commanded, if we wish to be truly unconquered. Of True Religion 87.²⁵

13:11 *The Nearness of Salvation*

Full Time to Awake.

Chrysostom: The time is short.... The day of resurrection and of the terrible judgment is fast approaching.... If you have done everything that was asked of you and are prepared for it, then you have nothing to fear,

but if you have not, then look out! Paul is not trying to frighten his hearers but to encourage them, so as to detach them from their love of the things of this world. It was not unlikely that at the beginning of their endeavors they would be more dedicated and slacken off as time went on. But Paul wants them to do the opposite—not to slacken as time goes on but to become even more dedicated. For the nearer the King is, the more they ought to be ready to receive him. Homilies on Romans 22.³²

The Acceptable Time.

Augustine: This relates to 2 Corinthians [6:2]: “Behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.” Paul means by this the time of the gospel and the opportunity to save all those who believe in God. Augustine on Romans 76.³³

13:12 *Putting on the Armor of Light*

The Son and the Promises.

Clement of Alexandria: By “day” and “light” he designates figuratively the Son, and by “the armor of light” he means the promises. Stromata 4.22.³⁷

Cast Off Works of Darkness.

Origen: This may be understood in both a universal and in a particular sense. In the first instance, the light is dawning everywhere, and the reign of darkness over the world is rapidly coming to an end.... In the second instance, if we have Christ in our hearts he gives us light. Therefore if the reason of knowledge drives away our ignorance and if we turn away from unworthy deeds and do what is right, we are in the light and are walking honestly as if in the day. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.³⁸

Bearing Arms for the Reign of Light.

Chrysostom: The day is calling us to get ready for the battle. Do not be afraid at the thought of bearing arms. It is a heavy and distasteful duty when we have to bear a visible suit of armor, but in this case it is desirable and worth it. For the arms we are called to bear are those of the light! Homilies on Romans 24.⁴²

The Day Is at Hand.

Augustine: Paul said this, yet look at how many years have passed since then! Yet what he said was not untrue. How much more probable it is that the coming of the Lord is near now, when there has been such an increase of time toward the end! Letter 77.⁴³

13:13 *Proper Conduct*

Works of the Flesh.

Origen: These are the works of darkness, which are also called the “works of the flesh,” in which people bind their flesh to luxury and uncleanness rather than to holiness or the Lord. “Reveling” refers to dishonorable and extravagant banqueting, which inevitably is prone to sexual immorality.... “Quarrel-ing and jealousy” are really acts of the mind, but like everything else here, they are called acts of the flesh. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.⁴⁹

Conduct Ourselves Becomingly As in the Day.

Jerome: Let us live our lives in the same way now as we are going to live in the day, that is, in the future world. Homilies on the Psalms 46.⁵⁰

Restraint of Excess.

Chrysostom: Paul does not forbid alcohol; he is opposed only to its excessive use. Nor does he prohibit sexual intercourse; rather, he is against fornication. What he wants to do is to get rid of the deadly passions of lust and anger. Therefore he does not merely attack them but goes to their source as well. For nothing kindles lust or wrath so much as excessive drinking. Homilies on Romans 24.⁵²

13:14 *Conformed to Christ*

Modest Dress.

Clement of Alexandria: Let the wife always make use of a plain dress, dignified, softer than that allowed her husband but not one that offends grossly against modesty nor one made with a view only to softness. Let the clothes be in keeping with the person’s age, with the individual himself, the place, his character

and occupation. The apostle well advises us: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Christ the Educator 3.11.56.⁵⁶

Put On Christ.

Origen: We have often said that Christ is wisdom, righteousness, holiness, truth and all the other virtues. Therefore anyone who has acquired these has put on Christ. For if all these are Christ, then the person who has them must of necessity have Christ as well. Whoever has them will not bother about the flesh. The apostle speaks here with some care, because he knows that we must take some thought for the needs of the flesh. It is the excesses and lusts of the flesh, not its basic needs, which must be avoided. Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.⁵⁷

Origen: The Lord Jesus Christ himself ... is said to be the clothing of the saints. On First Principles 2.3.2. ⁵⁸

Not to Gratify Excessive Desires.

Chrysostom: Here Paul no longer speaks of works, but rather he rouses his hearers to greater things. When he was speaking of vice he talked about its works, but now that he is speaking about virtue, he does not speak about works but about armor.... Even more strikingly, he talks about the Lord Jesus Christ as the garment we are to put on, for whoever is clothed with him has all virtue.

When Paul says “make no provision for the flesh,” he is not speaking of necessities but of excess. That is why he adds the qualifying phrase: “to gratify its desires.” Homilies on Romans 24.⁶¹

Make No Provision for the Flesh.

Augustine: Provision for the flesh is not to be condemned if it has to do with the needs of bodily health. But if it is a question of unnecessary delights or luxuries, a person who enjoys the delights of the flesh is rightly chastised. For in that case he makes provision for the desires of the flesh, and “he who sows in the flesh will reap corruption in the flesh.” ⁶² Augustine on Romans 77.⁶³