

Be the Revolution (When All Your Rights Are Wrong)

Romans 12:19-13:10

Romans (no. 36 in the series)

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Video and audio versions available online:

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

Because we're two weeks from the midterm elections, and our study in Romans just happens to fall on Romans 13 today, and I'm pretty much guaranteed to offend everyone. So, I'd like to point out three books that have shaped this message:

- [The Politics of Jesus](#) by Mennonite Scholar John Howard Yoder—it's pretty good
- [The Cost of Discipleship](#) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer—it's really good.
- [The Epistle to the Romans](#) by Karl Barth—it's epic.
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Barth and Bonhoeffer wrote in Germany while Adolph Hitler was rising to power—so this is not American Evangelical Fluff.

Let's pray: God I'm scared to talk about these things. So, help us not to be cowards; give us the courage to preach the Gospel in Jesus' name.

Message

Romans 13:1, ESV:

Romans 13:1-2:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

Well, that seems clear enough, doesn't it? So, who is the governing authority for us? Joe Biden, the Democratic House, the Republican Senate, and a bunch of courts. "No" you say, "We have a

constitutional democracy. Which means everyone's in authority to determine the majority, who is then our authority, but it's beginning to feel a bit like anarchy."

You know there's only one clear instance of democracy in Scripture, and that was the day the crowd voted for Jesus Barabbas and the death of Jesus of Nazareth. From the Old Testament, with reference to the Jubilee, one could make a good argument for socialism as the Biblical ideal. But with reference to all the buying and selling and Jesus' stories about stewards, you could make a good argument for capitalism as the Biblical ideal.ⁱ

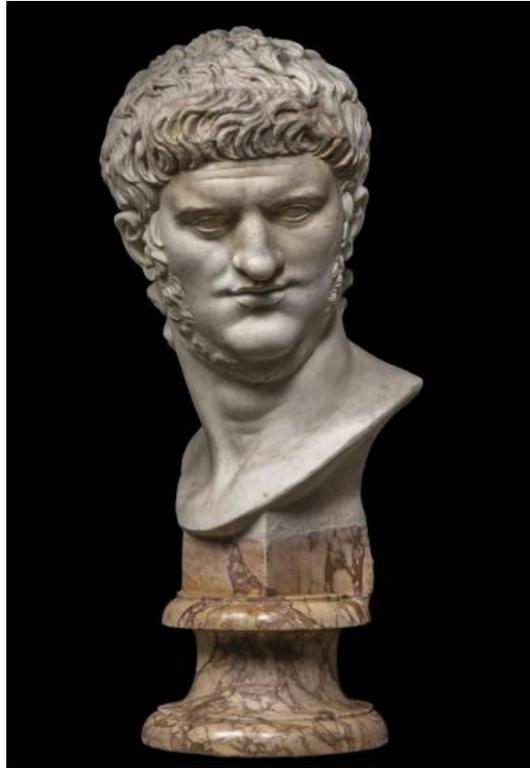
Well, this much is clear to me, when Republican are in power, they love to quote Romans 13:1-7 and complain about riots in all our major cities. And when Democrats are in power, they love to quote Romans 13:1-7 and complain about January 6th and riots at the capital.

Romans 13:2-7:

Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Hopefully, you're beginning to see a few complications with this text. In my experience most popular expositors will make this argument: "Well, you know, Paul was speaking in general terms. After twelve chapters of painstakingly precise theological argumentation, he was spit-balling and we all know what he means, don't we?" Others will actually make the argument that things were simpler back then, and Roman authorities actually came to Paul's defense a time or two. Well let's talk about that.

Basically, all scholars are unanimous in dating Paul's epistle to sometime between 55 and 57AD, just about 25 years after Christ was crucified. And so, we know exactly who the governing authorities were at that time.



Marble, AD 50–100 (with later restorations). Roma, Musei Capitolini; Archivio fotografico dei Musei Capitolini. © Roma, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali. Photo © Zeno Colantoni.

If you're confused about the meaning of the text, you can just plug this guy's name, wherever you read "authority." I don't know who you're planning to vote for, and I'm not going to tell you, but I would prefer anyone on any ballot to this guy.

His name is Nero—Emperor Nero. He murdered his own mother, kicked his pregnant wife to death, then married a young boy whom he had castrated and then repeatedly dressed to look like the bride whom he had just murdered.

In 64AD a fire broke out in Rome, and in order to divert suspicion from himself, according to the secular historian Tacitus, Nero blamed the Christians. And then he delighted in executing them for sport.ⁱⁱ Some were dipped in oil, crucified, and lit on fire to light up his garden parties. Others were sown in animal skins and torn apart by dogs to the cheers of the crowd.

In 66AD he ordered Vespasian to lay siege to Jerusalem, which fell to Rome in 70AD, just as Christ prophesied that it would. In biblical numerology the number of Nero's name is 666, identifying him as the Beast from the Sea in the Revelation. And so much of the early church identified him as the Anti-Christ. It was under Nero that Peter would be crucified upside down and Paul would be beheaded.

And yet Paul didn't know all of this when he wrote Romans. Claudius, Nero's stepfather, had been Emperor before Nero, from 41-54AD. It was Claudius that expelled all the Jews from Rome, including Aquila and Priscilla, who were Paul's closest of friends and fellow tentmakers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Before Claudius, from 37 to 41AD, a fellow named Caligula held the throne. He was the first emperor to publicly claim to be god, demand worship as god, and even call for his image to stand in the temple in Jerusalem. “There is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God,” writes Paul to the Romans in 56 or 57AD.

Perhaps Paul was referring to the Jewish Authorities in Jerusalem—the high priests and the Sanhedrin. In Romans 15:25 Paul will tell us that he’s on his way to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor and plans to then travel to Rome. From the book of Acts we know that the authorities try to kill him in Jerusalem. He does appeal to Caesar, but then is imprisoned for two years before he’s sent to Rome in chains where he ultimately loses his head.

By the time Romans is written, according to 2nd Corinthians 11, Paul has already been imprisoned multiple times and received countless beatings. He’s been publicly stoned, beaten with rods three times, and flogged five times—all by “the authorities”—flogged with the forty lashes less one, for forty lashes were said to kill a man. We just read, “rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad; do what is good and you will receive his approval.”

Did Jesus do what is good? Do we seriously think that Paul, in Romans 13, just kind of forgot that Jesus—literally the Good in flesh—only 25 years earlier, had been crucified on a tree in a garden by the Jewish authorities colluding with the Roman authorities relying upon the authority of the first democratic election recorded in Scripture? Did Paul just forget that? And did Paul forget that Jesus had said “any who would be my disciple must pick up his cross and follow”? By law, only the authorities—Roman authorities—were allowed to pound the nails. And do you know how they paid for the nails? Taxes.

Romans 13:6 “The authorities are ministers of God... because of this you pay taxes.” The Romans used tax money to fund the violent persecution of Christians and Jews, as well as fund their lavish garden parties of sexual debauchery and violence, followed by the common practice of abortion and infanticide. And Jesus told the Jews to “render unto Caesar that which is Caesars.” And we know that Jesus paid taxes to the Jewish authorities—the ones that had him killed—Peter got the money for the tax out of the mouth of a fish. “Be subject to the governing authorities (*exousia*—also translated “powers”); the rulers (*archon*: the princes or principalities).”

It’s all so weird to us, for in other places like Ephesians 6, Paul writes: “We battle not, we wrestle not, against flesh and blood, but against the rulers (*archon*: principalities), against the authorities (*exousia*: powers), against the cosmic (world) powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” So, we’re to be subject to the authorities, and battle them? Make sense? In Colossian 1:16 Paul writes, “In heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through [Christ] and for [Christ].” So, what does Paul mean by ‘rulers and authorities?’

Study it, and I think you’ll see what theologians like Hendrik Berkhof have brilliantly asserted, that Paul is referring to, basically, all organizational systems that govern our daily existence in this age. That would include civil governments, but also cultures, languages, psychologies and

sociologies, educational systems, economic systems, and the fallen angelic authorities that inhabit those systems.^{iv} The Biblical view is that it's all created by God, and yet, like humanity, it's all fallen and infected with evil.^v

The very first “*exousia*” is built by Cain after he murders his brother Abel. God sentences him to wander the earth, but in disobedience he builds the very first city, an organizational system for fallen man. It's rather shocking to study, but there really are no good “*exousia*” until one descends from heaven: NOT the Old Jerusalem, the great harlot, who rides the beast, BUT the New Jerusalem Coming Down—She's a living body. There are none good until then. And it's difficult to wait, huh...because we want vengeance.

Solomon wrote “Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of Adam is fully set to do evil.”^{vi} That's why we love the authorities: they execute judgments against evil deeds according to laws...^{vii} And that's why we're never satisfied: all their judgments are just more evil.

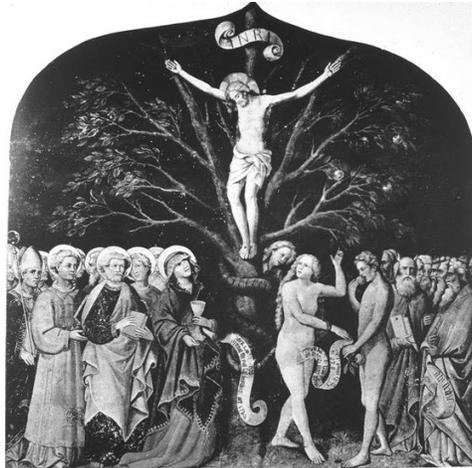
You say you want a revolution, well you know, we'd all love to change the world... You say you got a real solution... Don't you know, it's gonna' be all right?

The Apostle Paul writes, “Let every person be subject to the... authorities and rulers.” And he writes, “We battle... against them.” What the heck? Maybe we should read this in context. You know, there were no chapter divisions in Paul's letter, and I think he would be absolutely mortified to discover that we had chopped it up and turned it into slogans for calendars and refrigerator magnets.

Let's start where we left off last time.

Romans 12:14, Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...Verse 17 repaying no one evil for evil but providing good before all...Verse 19 ~~Beloved, never avenge yourselves~~ [not avenging yourselves, beloved]. But ~~leave it~~ [give space] to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”²⁰ ~~To the contrary~~ [*alla*: but, indeed, moreover, yes], “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”²¹ Do not be overcome [be conquered] by [the] evil, but overcome [conquer] [the] evil ~~with~~ [in] [the] good.^{viii} Let every person be subject [submit] to governing [higher] authorities...“Do not be conquered by the evil, but conquer the evil in the good.”

What is “the Good?”



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

This is the Good in flesh, hanging on a tree, in a garden. Now if you haven't been following these sermons or what Paul is saying in the book of Romans, this may sound like a bunch of jibber jabber and you will have millions of minor objections to everything I say. But if you pay attention, I think God might just use this news to set you free from the rulers and authorities and the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places—the authority of our adversary, that is, Satan.

This is the tree of the fruit of the knowledge of Good and evil in the middle of the garden that is the sanctuary of the human soul. This is the tree of law, and according to Paul, each of us has been tricked into taking fruit from this tree in order to create ourselves and justify ourselves—that is make ourselves right. But we haven't made ourselves right; we've actually trapped ourselves in a prison of wrong, a body of sin and death, called "the flesh."

This is the Good (and God alone is good)—the Good in flesh, like fruit, hanging on the tree in the middle of the garden. And this is the Life (Jesus is the Life) in flesh, like fruit, hanging on the tree in the very same place—the middle of the garden. When we take knowledge of the good, to make ourselves in the image of God, we also take the life of the good who is God, and for us, everything dies and we become slaves of the evil—we become vessels of wrath.

You can think of wrath as life that's been bottled up in an earthen vessel, the way Jesus was bottled up in an earthen tomb—a tomb of stone. You experience wrath when a person takes life, and refuses to give life, and yet every child of Adam does this very thing continually—we refuse to love. Love is a decision to give life as you have received life; Love is presenting your body a sacrifice to God in the temple that is your neighbor.

Law reveals that we should love, but we don't love, for we have chosen evil. Law is good, but the way we have taken it is "the evil." And now we're beginning to know it. We've preached about that for a year

So, now our question is, what is a "governing authority?" Well, it's legislation (that means the making of laws). And when Paul speaks of law, he's not just talking about Old Testament law, he's talking about any law—any knowledge of good and evil taken and imposed upon the human

psyche. The Ten Commandments were perhaps the best law, for God wrote them on stone and gave them to Moses, and yet we all took law in the beginning and buried it in our hearts—our hearts of stone.

So anyway, a governing authority is legislation, and the judgment of those under the legislation, and the execution—legislative, judicial, and executive—the execution of rewards and punishment for all in the organizational system.

So, isn't a human government, simply, evil organizing evil? "None is righteous, no not one" wrote Paul. Do we really think that organizing ourselves will right the wrong? Karl Barth writes, "Is there anywhere legality which is not fundamentally illegal?"^{ix}

So how do the rulers and authorities operate? Well, at their best, which may actually be their worst, they appeal to your passions—the passions of the flesh—the desires of us vessels of wrath.

So, here's my basket of vessels of wrath [takes several pieces of PVC pipe out of a basket]. Two sermons ago, I had each of these encased in clay, for each of us has taken the Life, and refused to surrender the Life, which is death. We've imprisoned the Life in a vessel of clay, and then called it our own. [holds up one 6-inch piece of straight pipe] "This is my life!"

And at that the "governing authorities" appeal to my passions, saying, "Hey you have a right to that life, and you have a right to liberty (freedom), and a right to happiness (that is "blessing"). And we will grant those rights by forming a covenant to protect you from all who would violate your rights... a covenant of self-interest... you know: to save ourselves from losing ourselves."

Maybe I start a government by saying "Hey, I'm a six-inch pipe—this is my life—that's my judgment. And hey, you also look like a six-inch pipe. Let's join together to protect ourselves from those 90-degree elbows." [tapes together two 6-inch straight pipes]. That's a threat to the 90-degree elbows, and so they join together to protect their rights, for they suspect that the straight pipes would violate their right to life, (which is actually death), and their right to freedom (which is actually bondage). [tapes together some elbow fittings].

And then the six-inch straight pipes get intimidated and say, "You're exclusive and intolerant; We're tolerant and inclusive for we have bound ourselves to the four-inch straight pipes." [tapes some 4-inch straight pipes to the 6-inch pipes already taped together]. And then it all becomes most evil when these groups of human legislation, adjudication and execution say, hey this is the Will of God, this is the kingdom of God—this is life, liberty, and happiness.

And now, what is the vengeance that our governing authorities provide? Well, if someone takes your life, liberty, or happiness, they help you take that someone's life, liberty, or happiness, as if that would make you happy, alive or liberated. It's the Lex Talionis: an eye for an eye, a life for a life, a slap on the cheek for a slap on the cheek, if someone takes your coat, you take their coat. That's a part of divinely prescribed justice for the Hebrews in the wilderness, as it was a part of justice in my home when the children were little.

One day Elizabeth bit Susan on the bottom when she bent over to vacuum. And the doctor told Susan that she needed to bite Elizabeth on the bottom, just so that she'd know how it felt—so that she'd gain knowledge of evil. Knowledge of evil is an important step in the development of any child, who might one day choose the Good in freedom. But knowledge of evil is definitely not the same as being known by the Good and knowing the Good.

It's been thirty years since Elizabeth experienced a little of her own evil. And now I don't think Elizabeth is even tempted to bite Susan in the bottom, but she delights in doing good for her mom. For in all those years Susan always showered Elizabeth with unconditional good—even as she bit her in the bottom that day thirty years ago.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye... but I say to you, if someone slaps you on the cheek turn the other also. Do not resist the one who is evil,” said the Good, in human flesh, at just the right stage of our development.

Jesus fulfills the law, even the Lex Taliones. We all took the life from the tree in the garden. But Jesus gave the life on the tree in the garden for us and even in us. He returned our life, which is his life, to our Father. He returned the very life that we had taken, even as we took it, for your life is actually his life, you have no right to life; it's all His Life!

He lifted his head and cried “father into your hands I commit my Spirit”—“The Spirit is Life,” wrote Paul. And the Life is in the Blood. So did Jesus repay evil with evil, or did he conquer the evil as the Good? In other words, what is the vengeance of God?

Human vengeance is taking life, for someone has taken your life. The vengeance of God is to give his life before anyone could ever take his life—it is fore-giveness, forgiveness.



Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.

- It is “the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.”
- It is the blood of the lamb, crucified from the foundation of the world.
- It is the violence of the kindness of God at the edge of time and eternity.

And how does it work in time? Jesus is rejected by the authorities—on good Friday. [tears one straight pipe from the bundle of straight pipes]. We all take his life, and he give his life to all—He bleeds for all of us. Someone sees and surrenders to the judgment of God, perhaps a Roman Centurion, a thief hanging nearby, or Mary the former demoniac. [tears one elbow fitting from the bundle of elbow fittings and joins it to the straight pipes]. Then they forgive as they've been forgiven; they love because they've first been loved. [joins those pieces to other individual pieces]. But that's NOT a decision that can be legislated by the rulers and authorities and then enforced from the outside. [assembles the body of the Pipe Man]. That's a decision that is made in communion with God in the Sanctuary of each and every soul. In other words, it's the decision of a free-will. It's the decision of a vessel of wrath that has now become a vessel of mercy.

Do you see how this is a radically different type of government from that of all the rulers and authorities of this present darkness? This is the government of a body, unified by one Spirit, one Breath, flowing throughout all the members of the body, [pretends to pour communion wine in the neck of the body] under the authority of one head. [Puts the head on the Pipe Man body]. This is not law; this is life, and freedom, and blessing. This is literally the righteousness of God.

And how is this built? Not by people demanding their rights—"My life!" [takes one piece off]. But by people surrendering all their rights as wrong. [puts piece back on]. And thereby becoming the righteousness of God. And now I hear the objections because I also object. I want to scream "If I live like this, I'm bound to get crucified." And Paul would say, "That is exactly my point, therefore present your bodies a sacrifice—living, holy and pleasing to God; pick up your cross."

Isn't it ironic that all our best arguments for human governmental authorities are basically this idea that without them we might get crucified? And yet, who was it that crucified Jesus? And this is super doubly ironic: It was Roman authorities, Jewish authorities, and Democratic authorities, all bound together in our best shot at a city, the city of peace: Jerusalem.

So, what in the HECK is Paul's point in Romans 13? Let's read it again and I'll try to give you the most literal translation.

Romans 12:21-13:1:

Do not be overcome [conquered] by [the] evil, but overcome [conquer], [the] evil with [in] [the] good. ^{13:1} Let every person [soul] be subject to the governing (higher,) authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Now this is nothing new. Paul already told us in Chapter 9 that God called Pharaoh and hardened Pharaoh for his purposes. In Jeremiah, God calls Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; he calls him his "servant"—who carries out wrath on the Jews. And then in Isaiah, God calls Cyrus king of Persia, his "shepherd, his anointed" who carries out wrath on Babylon. God institutes all authorities, but that doesn't mean they're good; your own psyche is an authority and it's not so good.

1 Peter 2:13, Peter writes "be subject to every human institution..." And yet in Acts 4:18 the authorities charge Peter and John to never speak or teach in Jesus' name, and they respond, "We

cannot but speak of what we have seen.” They recognized an authority above the “authorities.” So, being subject, doesn’t mean doing whatever the authority tells you to do... even though the authority is instituted by God. In Acts 4:23, Peter, John and all the disciples gather and quote Psalm 2 about the rulers of the earth battling the Christ and Christ conquering the rulers. And then, they start praising God that King Herod and Pontius Pilate and the peoples, had done and were doing exactly what God had predestined for them to do. They praise God, that—in Paul’s words—“those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.” Romans verse 2, ~~Therefore~~ So whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

We assume that’s bad, but the fact that God would judge between Peter and the Sanhedrin—well, I bet Peter considered that to be good. The fact that God would judge between Jesus and the opinions of Pilate, Herod, the chanting crowd—I bet Jesus considered that to be good. If you speak against the authorities, it will produce great stress in your soul. And the greatest comfort is knowing that you will be judged by God.

Romans verse 3, For rulers are not a terror to ~~good conduct~~ [the good work]. You know Jesus is literally The Good Work of God in Human Flesh. He felt pain, wept tears, and did not enjoy the shame of being crucified, but he was utterly unafraid of Pilate, Herod, the Crowd, and you. He even said to Peter—right after Judas kissed him and Peter had drawn his sword—He said, “Peter, don’t you know that I can just ask the Father and he will send 12 legions of angels?” But he didn’t ask the Father, he didn’t raise an army, he didn’t start of revolution, he didn’t even defend his rights in court; he drank the cup the father had for him and submitted himself to the governing authorities. And now listen closely: This is precisely how he conquered the governing authorities, all of them, one of them being you.

Right after Paul tells us that Jesus is the head of all rule and authority in Colossians 2, he writes “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh (that is a vessel of wrath), God made alive together with [Christ], having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (We took the Life, and thus we owed the Life, but on the cross Jesus surrendered the Life, and thus forgives the Life from the foundation of the world) ¹⁵He [God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him [Christ].” You see the Grace of God is not just a nice idea; it is the substance of reality invading the illusions of this world; the rulers of this world crucify Jesus and he won’t stay dead.

Romans 13:3:

For rulers are not a terror to ~~good conduct~~ [The Good Work—that’s Grace] but to ~~bad~~ [the bad work—that’s our flesh: me-sus and we-sus].

Would you have no fear of the ~~one who is in~~ authority? Then do ~~what is~~ [the] good, and ~~you will receive his approval~~ [you will have praise from it]. Because Christ emptied himself, took the form of a slave, and humbled himself to the point of death at the hands of the authorities, Paul writes to the Philippians that “God has highly exalted him, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father.”

In Ephesians Paul teaches that Jesus defeated the rulers and authorities at the cross, and yet through the church—Christ’s body on earth—God is still revealing his “manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”^x In other words, we broke the body of Christ, and he bled the vengeance of God. And now we are the body of Christ, and we also bleed the vengeance of God—every time we forgive; every time we feed our enemy or give him something to drink—every time we bleed the kindness of God.^{xi}

Romans 13:4:

for he [it] is God’s servant ~~for your good~~ [to you for the good]. But if you do wrong [the evil], be afraid, for he [it] does not bear the sword in vain. For he [it] is the servant of God, an avenger ~~who carries out God’s~~ [eis: for] wrath ~~on the wrongdoer~~ [to the one doing the evil].

“The evil” is taking life and not giving life, and that’s what fills all of us with wrath, and there is a place for “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But if you’re a Christian, it’s NOT your place—you no longer work the vengeance of this age, you’ve been called to bleed the vengeance of God, the life of the age to come, eternal life in your veins right now.

Romans 13:5:

Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience [*suneidesis*: consciousness].

You do not want to generate wrath by taking life and refusing to give life. But more than that—you are conscious of reality on the other side of the curtain... That we are all one body in Christ, and so you love your neighbor as yourself for your neighbor is yourself and the temple of God.

Romans 13:6-8:

For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. ⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other.

Did you get that? You don’t owe taxes to the governing authorities. But pay your taxes, writes Paul, why? Well, because you love your neighbor!

Romans 13:8-9:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Now Paul is writing to the church in Rome. Who is there neighbor? I’ll give you a hint: the number of his name is 666. So, what the Hell is Paul saying to the church in Rome? Or better, what is the Spirit saying through Paul to the Church in Rome?

“*You say you want a revolution?*” Well, don’t start a revolution; Don’t organize a political movement; Don’t resort to legislation, adjudication, and don’t try to execute the judgment of God; but subject yourself to the governing authorities and you will bleed the judgment of God, the vengeance of God, the very reality of the age to come.”

I think the Spirit is saying, “I know that you are the last and the least; I know you are the servants, and the slaves, and the women in Roman society, and you are the Jews who are now hunted and hated by gentiles; You are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and you are the meek. But you have just discovered that you inherit the earth, and that of you is literally constructed the kingdom of God, for you are his beloved sons and daughters and in you is a power absolutely immeasurable. But you are about to be tempted, by the tempter, who will offer you the kingdoms of this world—if only you will adopt his methods, his “*methodeia*,”^{xii} his organizational system...

In seven years, some of you will be sown in animal skins and fed to the dogs for the amusement of the crowd. Some of you will be dipped in oil, nailed to crosses, and set on fire to shed light on the orgies of the Emperor—his garden parties. Peter, I once told you that one day another would bind you and take you where you do not wish to go. Peter, you will flee the city, but see me and then, bound by love, you will turn, run back into the city, and be crucified upside down with me. And Paul, you will lose your head, and the whole world will find it.

But listen closely: you will be tempted...

- You will be tempted to curse your enemies; I’m calling you to bless them.
- You will be tempted to take their life; but I’m calling you to bleed my life.
- You will be tempted to claim your rights; but I’m calling you to be my righteousness.
- You will be tempted to start a revolution; but I am calling you to be the revolution.
- You will be tempted to repay evil with evil, but I’m calling you to conquer the evil in the Good—I am the Good and you are my body.

No man hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, and so I nourish and cherish you and I will rise in you, and with you, and through you. And together we will sit on my throne. There is no greater authority. My dearest church in Rome we are about to conquer all things.

And now check this out, church in Denver: What are we reading two-thousand years later on a Sunday morning? The wisdom of Nero? No, Paul’s letter to those very Romans. But do you understand? We are also being tempted. We’re being tempted to adopt the illusions of the evil one and so surrender the power of God.

We can battle the governing authorities with more governing authorities, but they’re still governing authorities, and usually worse governing authorities because we advertise them as Good and sometimes—God forbid—we advertise them as the Kingdom of God. And don’t get me wrong on this: I hope you care deeply about abortion, and healthcare, and immigration, and immigrants, and the climate, and the economy because they affect people. And yet, our government doesn’t have the power to change one person’s heart. But you do; you can bleed the vengeance of God.^{xiii}

So, I hope you vote, but you can do something infinitely more powerful than that. You can look for someone that considers you to be their enemy. And if they're hungry, you can feed them... if they're hungry—don't force feed them, but in all seriousness, find them and pay for their lunch. And if they're thirsty, you can give them something to drink. And now you may say, well this is America. Everyone has more than enough to eat and drink. Who's hungry or thirsty and what could I give them to eat or drink.

Communion

Well, Jesus found his enemies and he gave them something to eat and drink. He took bread and broke it saying, "this is my body given to you, take and eat and do it in remembrance of me." And he took the cup saying, "this is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you and do it in remembrance of me."

Benediction

I'm 61 and I feel rather powerless. So, I watch the news a lot. You see, I think politics is tempting for me, it gives me the illusion of power. But I'm reminding us that when we forgive as we've been forgiven, when we love as we've been loved, when we're kind to the unkind, we bleed the Power of God, the revolution of God. So Repent and believe the Gospel. Amen.

Benediction

And so, Lord God, everything's gonna' be alright. Father, together, in Jesus' name, we bless the United States of America—we bless the Republicans, we bless the Democrats, we bless the Independents, and all the crazy people running around in the woods, we bless Russia, we bless Israel, we bless Palestine, we bless Great Britain, Germany, France and all of Europe and Asia, Africa, South America, North America, everybody in Australia, anybody that happens to be hanging out in Antarctica—we bless them Father, in Jesus' name. And now, Lord God, we confess to you that we have been anxious over who wins the election. God, if we happened to elect Nero, we'd be just fine. For we are always one heartbeat away from the other side of the curtain. That makes us unstoppable and dangerous. So, Lord God, would you help us to believe what you have told us—that we, Lord Jesus, might be your revolution on Earth. That we would stop demanding our rights and we would become the very righteousness of God. For you have conquered. Help us remember what Paul wrote in chapter eight, "In all these things, we are more than conquerors," he said to the Romans, "more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." And so, God, we confess to you our anxiety, our insecurity, our fear, and we thank you that you have conquered, and we are in you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ If we're honest I think we'd have to admit that the ideal is "Free Market Communism," however it must descend from heaven as it did on the day of Pentecost when all the disciples freely chose to share everything in common.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/historical-theology/persecution-of-christianity-ad-33-325/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 18:1-4

^{iv} In the Old Testament Israel does battle with nations, but also the demonic entities that inhabit those nations. So when the Ammonites go into exile, Milcom their deity, also goes into exile (Jeremiah 49:3). When Moab goes into exile, so does Chemosh their deity (Jeremiah 48:7)

^v In reading this short book you will learn that when Paul talks about principalities and powers he is referring to all those forces outside of us that influence and direct our behavior. He is referring not only to demons but to such social institutions as the government, the educational system, the economic system, and the family. Principalities and powers also refers to such things as the media and advertising. If Paul were among us today he would certainly consider television to be a major principality and power that impacts our lives. Who can question the ways in which such forces as MTV have molded the mind-set of a generation?

What Paul is telling us, according to Berkhof, is that these principalities and powers were originally created and ordained by God to contribute to our good and wellbeing (col. 1:6). However, because of sin, we have not only given the Evil One a stronghold in our personal lives, but we have also allowed him to gain control over these principalities and powers as well. Government, television, and other principalities and powers are now, according to Berkhof's understanding of Paul, exercising horrendous negative influences on us. Those demonic forces which would hurt us work through these means to bring us into Satan's sphere of control.

- Tony Campolo, *How to Be Pentecostal*, p. 136.

By the cross . . . Christ abolished the slavery which, as a result of sin, lay over our existence as a menace and an accusation. On the cross He "disarmed" the Powers, "made a public example of them and thereby triumphed over them." . . .

He "made a public example of them." It is precisely in the crucifixion that the true nature of the Powers has come to light. Previously they were accepted as the most basic and ultimate realities, as the gods of the world. Never had it been perceived, nor could it have been perceived, that this belief was founded on deception. . . . The Pharisees, personifying piety, crucified Him in the name of piety. Pilate, representing Roman justice and law, shows what these are worth when called upon to do justice to the Truth Himself. Obviously, "none of the rulers of this age," who let themselves be worshipped as divinities, understood God's wisdom, "for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 2:8). Now they are unmasked as false gods by their encounter with Very God; they are made a public spectacle. Thus Christ has "triumphed over them." The unmasking is actually already their defeat. . . .

The very presence of the church in a world ruled by the Powers is a superlatively positive and aggressive fact. . . . All resistance and every attack against the gods of this age will be unfruitful, unless the church herself is resistance and attack, unless she demonstrates in her life and fellowship how men can live freed from the Powers.

- Hendrik Berkhof, from *The Politics of Jesus* by John Howard Yoder

^{vi} Ecclesiastes 8:11

^{vii} Usually the evil deeds of the last authority.

^{viii} "The Good" is Jesus. It's so telling that the translator translates "*en*" with the English preposition "with" when *en* is almost exclusively translated as "in." We see the Good as a tool that we can use, which is precisely the serpents temptation: use the Good to make yourself good. The Good is Jesus and we are not to simply "use him" we are called to be "in him" as he is in us. He is not a dead idea; he is our living bridegroom; he is our life.

^{ix} Barth, Romans, p. 479

^x Ephesians 3:10

^{xi} When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die... The right way to requite evil, according to Jesus, is not to resist it. This saying of Christ removes the Church from the sphere of politics and law. The Church is not to be a national community like the

old Israel, but a community of believers without political or national ties. The old Israel had been both-the chosen people of God and a national community, and it was therefore His will that they should meet force with force. But with the Church it is different: it has abandoned political and national status, and therefore it must patiently endure aggression... Resistance merely creates further evil and adds fuel to the flames... By his willingly renouncing self-defense, the Christian affirms his absolute adherence to Jesus, and his freedom from the tyranny of his own ego. The exclusiveness of this adherence is the only power which can overcome evil... Once again, Jesus calls those who follow Him to share His passion. How can we convince the world by our preaching of the passion when we shrink from that passion in our own lives? ...The cross is the only power in the world which proves that suffering love can avenge and vanquish evil.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp.73, 121-125

^{xii} Ephesians 6:11 "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes (*mothedeia*: methods) of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities..."

^{xiii} The Body of Jesus Christ, in which we are taken up with the whole human race, has now become the ground of our salvation... In His human body He takes all flesh upon Himself...That is why He is called the Second Adam or the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Like Christ Himself, the first Adam had been both an individual and the representative of the whole human race. he too bore the whole race in himself. IN him the human race fell, In Adam (which means "man" in Hebrew) man fell (Rom. v. 19). Christ is the Second Man (1 Cor. 15:47)in whom the new Humanity is created. he is the "New Man"... All men are "with Christ" as a consequence of the incarnation... In Christ we no longer live our own lives, but He lives His life in us. The life of the faithful in the Church is indeed the Life of Christ in them (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 John 4:15)... Blessed is he whom God deems worthy to suffer for the Body of Christ... The Body of Christ is the living temple of God and of the new Humanity.

--Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 181-183 187, 189, 191.