

Romans 13: Paul's Coded Reality

Apostle Paul's Subtle Message on Rulers, Taxes, Bribes, Fear and Respect

Posted by Charles E Carlson August 10, 2017 (updated from July 2016)

Romans 13 begins with what seems to be the most politician-friendly statement in the Christian Bible. The first six verses, believed to be written by the apostle Paul in the first century AD, are quoted here from a solid translation of three surviving ancient Greek texts. These on the surface state that magistrates, rulers, potentates, ministers, dictators, and possibly even tax collectors of Paul's day, were chosen by God to do His work on earth. In these six terse verses, Paul warned his reader to be obedient to them for 'conscience' sake. I find in verse 7 a coded reality message to his followers, the key to understanding the first six verses as a satire on earthly politicians that remains valid today .



Romans 13, 1-6: Concordant Greek Literal New Testament

1.Let every soul be subject to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except under God. 2.Now those which are, have been set under God, so that he who is resisting an authority has withstood God's mandate. Now those who have withstood will be getting judgment for themselves, 3.for magistrates are not a fear to the good acts, but to the evil. Now you do not want to be fearing the authority. 4.Do good and you will be having applause from it. For it is God's servant for your good. Now if you should be doing evil, fear, for not feigned is it wearing the sword. For it is God's servant, an avenger for indignation to him who is committing evil. 5.Therefore it is necessary to be a subject not only because of indignation, but also because of conscience. 6.For therefore you are also settling taxes, for they are God's ministers, perpetuated for this self same thing.

A review of the ancient Greek texts reveals some minor differences from more modern translations such as the King James Version.

Notwithstanding, in these verses Paul is indeed saying those who resist governing authority will bring God's judgment upon themselves. The obvious question is, if he wrote it, why did he write it?

The answer is found loud and clear in verse 7, but this must be read from the ancient Greek text as quoted herein, for most bible translations have materially distorted Romans 13: verse 7.

Romans 13:7 *Render to all their due, to whom taxes, tax, to whom tribute, tribute, to whom fear, fear, to whom honor, honor.*
(Concordant Literal Greek NT)

Note also that these first six verses stand in contrast, and seemingly without any direct connection, to the context of both chapter 12 and the rest of chapter 13, which are about service to others and loving one's brothers. Further, this writer does not find the idea of the divinity of rulers expressed anywhere else in Paul's writing, nor in quotes from Jesus. Paul did not write about politics, but of following Jesus. In fact, except for Romans 13: 1-6, I have yet to find where Paul discusses the acts of Roman leaders, except to

account for his own persecution, jail time and floggings. I ask our readers, especially pastors, to examine the very strong likelihood that Paul wrote this one six-verse passage as a piercing satire. Verse 7 contains the coded instructions to understanding that satire. A useful definition of satire is [found in Wikipedia](#). *Satire: Its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit to draw attention to both particular and wider issues in society... "in satire, irony is militant"[2]... This ?militant? irony or sarcasm often professes to approve of (or at least accept as natural) the very things the satirist wishes to attack.*

Fortunately, Paul leaves us a pointed hint that he wrote this passage in code, meaning that the truth lies in exactly the reverse of what he wrote about the relationship between political leaders and God. He left an indelible key, or antidote, in the very next verse, seven:

Render to all their due, to whom taxes, tax, to whom tribute, tribute, to whom fear, fear, to whom honor, honor. (Concordant Literal Greek NT)

In verses 1-6, Paul ostensibly is saying do not think for yourself, respect all Roman authority, not because they can beat or kill you, but because God put them in office. But in verse 7 Paul asks the reader to think and judge for himself, to respect only he who deserves it. Paul reminds followers that some in high places must be feared for good reason. I believe Paul's message is a coded communication designed to provide his followers with basic instructions to apply in dealing with the Romans' power over them. He did not say "revolt against political leaders" because this was not his mission. He placated them by what he wrote so he could bring Jesus' message to them! No doubt Romans could read Greek. In the book of Acts we find detailed accounts of Paul's several attempts to persuade potentates, both Roman and Judean, to follow Jesus. Among them were Roman Governor Felix, Porcius Festus and King Agrippa Herod.

Apostle Paul's antidote reveals the corrupting power of high government office.

It seems abundantly obvious that Paul wrote with a hidden message, perhaps not wanting to go public with the idea that authorities were corrupt, self-serving and brutal, for to do so might have resulted in an early crucifixion or beheading. Paul did the next best thing. He seems to have painted the political and religious leaders exactly the opposite of what he probably believed, knowing his followers would immediately recognize his satire. When he says superior authorities are carrying out God's work, he means exactly the opposite of this, and his readers knew it because they knew him.

Perhaps the most biting part of the satire is the use of the Greek word for "tribute" or bribe, in addition to taxes. Those who collected taxes for the Roman government were no mystery. They came around and demanded the money. Paul said, "Pay it".

Then there were those who demanded ?tribute?. The word for the hated tribute extractors, which came from the Greek (Tel on' es), is literally rendered ?FINISHER?. Paul advises to not resist the tax nor the bribe taker, but not because these collectors are ?God's ministers?. The implication is clear: pay it out of fear, because you have to.

I ask, if magistrates were really God's agent for good, would you have to fear them, would you have to bribe them? Paul's antidote leaves it up to each follower to decide, whereas the first six satirical verses allow for no decisions, because public servants are ?appointed by God to reward those who do good?. Yes, his followers had to obey or die. As Paul wrote, they ?bear the sword?. But honoring them is another matter!

Why does Paul associate ?fear? with political leaders? Fear comes from the Greek (phob e'o), which has the same root as terror. So fear leaders who can hurt you. Paul's 18-word coded antidote can be summed up in: Pay them, fear them, but do not honor them, and remember you must decide for yourself who is and who is not honorable.

Paul's one-line antidote explains his satire. His followers were not to follow authorities blindly after all, nor should we. He warns his readers it is natural to fear government, but they should use their own discernment. They were to respond, when facing these political wielders of raw power, not with blind obedience, but in total self-reliance on their own instincts.

Paul was not writing to support today's warmongering politicians looking for an excuse to start or continue another mass-killing exercise in some far-away place. Nor was he writing for the benefit of "Christian" pastors who want to ingratiate themselves to these politicians. He did not intend his words to be used to start wars that maim and slaughter, which is how Romans 13 is being used today. Donald Trump knows about Romans 13, it's probably pasted to the locker door where he switches to his golf gear before entertaining some mega-church pastor who advises him on how to deal with sincere Christ Followers.

Note that Paul then returns to his normal theme in verses 8 & 9, of this same chapter 13, explaining how Jesus' mission is to be accomplished; *?Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who is loving one to another has fulfilled the Law?.*

Paul was the constant, never-swerving servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was also the inveterate, bold, but practical salesman, who used every scheme and device of persuasion to convince all he met to follow Jesus, even the Judean king and his Roman

torturer and jailers. His use of satire may be rare, but we should not be surprised he would use it.

Perhaps Paul needed to fool the authorities who kept him in jail or watched him constantly. Paul painted them to be as godly as they were godless. Did not Nero prove this to be so?

Please, Pastors and Christian Leaders, stop compromising with political America using Romans 13 as your excuse to justify war and tyranny. Would Apostle Paul cater to the Bush family, Obama, the Clintons and Donald Trump? I doubt it. How about Stalin and Hitler? What about Pontius Pilate, King Agrippa Herod, the Chief Priest, and Pharisee leaders, and most Israelite Kings throughout history? Could Paul possibly mean it when he says these leaders are God's agents to reward the good and punish evil doers? Satire is a great way to expose those who do evil beyond description.

Most Christ-followers think they are reading the words in Romans 13 ?literally? but from partly corrupted translations, including the Authorized King James Version. No idea could be more damaging than that our appointed and elected politicians are God-anointed, and that we should honor them as they drag us from one war to another, from mass murder to summary executions.

Please, reserve your ?honor? (respect) for Jesus and those who follow Jesus, the ?peacemaker?. This writer thinks Paul did.

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