

## Romans Chapter 13 - John Karmelich

Title: We got bigger fish to fry!

Let's be honest, nobody likes to pay taxes. There are many things the government uses my taxes for I'd consider immoral. Besides the risk of going to prison, why should I pay taxes? Realize that Paul, who's the author of Romans, lived during the peak of the Roman Empire. They had their problems, including allowing slavery to exist! Despite that, Paul urged all Christians to pay their taxes! I can argue he had "bigger fish to fry", preaching the Gospel while traveling around the empire. That's why we should pay taxes as well. Of course we should take our legal deductions, but the bigger point is about being a good witness for God! That's the major topic of this section. It also makes me wonder why Paul jumps from discussing how Christians should behave to dealing with the government?

It comes down to being a good witness for God. If we want people to think we're a good witness, it's a necessity that they don't think we're bad people. If Christians were exempt from taxes, someone would look at us and think they don't have to pay, maybe I can be a Christian and get out of that! We must be subject to government laws at the least to be a good witness to those around us! We may hate having to pay, but it's a "necessary evil" and a part of life. Paul gets into a few other issues in this chapter, but all of this comes down to is being a good witness for Jesus! That is why doing "those things" are required of us! Of course, this can apply to any person and not necessarily a believer, but Paul wants to remind us that we must obey the law at the least to be a good witness for Jesus! In short, God wants us to be a good witness for Him as that's our "bigger fish we're called to fry"! OK then, time for the details:

Remember no chapter breaks exist in the original text. In effect the text of Chapter 13 continues what's Paul's key point in Chapter 12, verse 1 that we are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. That is the main theme of both chapters with the rest of the text being specific examples of how we're to act, given different situations. The last part of chapter dealt with the issue of "overcoming evil with good!" It's part of what Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). The main idea of letting God deal with issues too big or painful for us to handle, so we can be a good witness for Him. That leads to another indescribably horrible thing for most of us obeying those in authority. Those civil leaders who are in charge (i.e., government, police soldiers) are in effect God ordained. Paying our taxes and living honorably prevent such authorities coming down on us. Yes of course, there are situations where good people get arrested and falsely charged. When Paul went from town to town, he ended up in jail for the horrible crime of preaching Jesus! As Peter said, when told he can't preach the Gospel, he gave a great response, "We ought to obey God rather than man!" (Acts 5:29-32.) Of course, we can't block traffic to preach the Gospel, but the idea here is to do what God calls us to do, use our life as a witness for Him. That includes (unfortunately) paying taxes.

I was thinking about obeying authorities: What about the American Revolution? Obviously, there can be exceptions when situations are bad. Remember in the Old Testament there were nonbelieving rulers God used (Babylonian and Medo-Persian emperors) where God used them to punish the called (Israel!) for disobedience. I'm not saying governments are perfect. Paul lived during the time of Emperor Nero, and to put it nicely, he wasn't kind to Christians! I'd argue Paul's main point is that Christians are called to be a living witness for God (that's our "bigger fish to fry"). Obeying the government and paying our taxes makes us less likely to stand out in a bad way, so we can use our spiritual gifts to be a witness for Him to strengthen believers and be a witness to non-believers around us!

By the time Paul gets to Verse 8 in this chapter, he states to leave no debt outstanding because those of us who show love (care) for others and put their interest before our own, are showing love. By the way I doubt Paul would be against say, getting a home loan, as losing our home motivates paying! Think of no outstanding debt as anything from a personal promise to pay something to an obligation! If we want to focus on our "bigger fish to fry", then we should have a reputation for keeping our word! Of course, if we mess up in the past, turn from it. Then Paul states a few of the 10 Commandments. No, he is not saying we must obey them to be saved. The issue's being a good witness for Jesus and that includes not stealing, killing or even desiring what's rightfully not ours. I know none of us are perfect, nor does God expect us to be! The issue is about being a good witness for Him. If we set our minds on living as God desires and ask the Spirit to guide our lives, it's amazing how much better we act then!

The last few verses of this chapter get into the reminder that the day of the Lord comes! Let me talk on that for a second. It's been 2,000 years. Do I really believe Jesus will return to rule the world after that horrible 7-year period the Bible talks about? Of course. The bible has been 100% accurate with history to date! I've always argued every aspect of Jesus first coming is written in clues in the Old Testament! If I can trust the accuracy of that, I can trust the future! I like mentioning from the time of Adam to the time of Abraham (first Jew) was about 2,000 years. From the time of Adam to the church age, time of Jesus, was about 2,000 years. So, am I shocked it's 2,000 years of the "church age" and counting? No, and neither should you be!

Think about it another way: How long do we get to live? If we're lucky, till our 90's, or maybe turn to 100 or more! How long is that in historical time? If you talk to the elderly, they'll tell you how fast all of it goes by! Since none of us know how long we get to live, "time is short" and we're called to use it as a witness for God. Paul's final point of this chapter in effect is, "don't waste the most valuable thing we own, our time, but use it for His glory!" Does that mean we can never relax or enjoy life? To think like that misses the point. To quote one of my mentors, "Going shopping take Jesus with you!", "Going to a sporting event, take Jesus with you!" OK you get the idea.

Paul's got a few more chapters left on the subject on how to live. Remember he is writing to Christians he never met, so that's why he's going "off" on Christian behavior. Yes, we are saved by faith alone. I always like to ask, "saved to do what"? In effect that's the purpose of my ministry. OK everyone, that's it for each of us. God called us to "fry fish for Him" meaning using our lives as a witness for Him, so I hope each of us take that as our "marching orders" to use the gifts God gave us to make a difference for Him in the world around us!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that one, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff, and again I'm grateful for all of you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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