

- Week 20 -

Romans 13

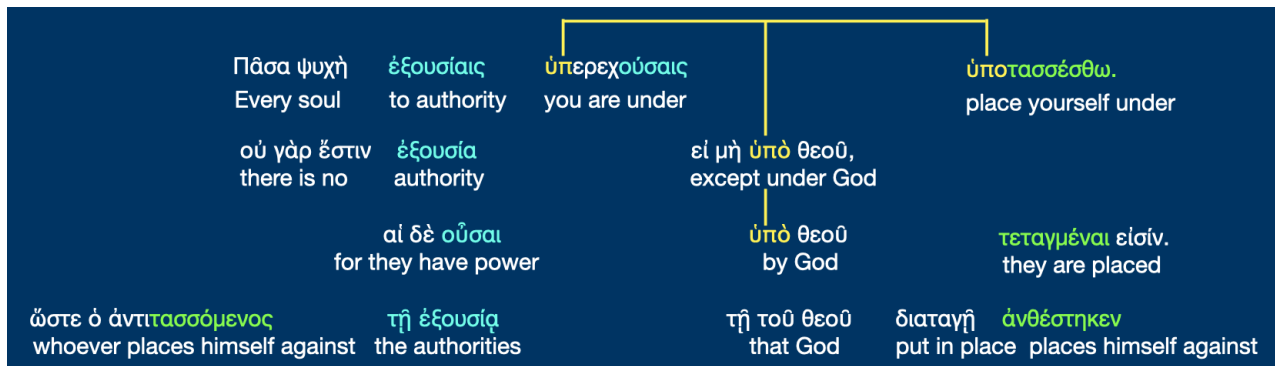
This entire section is built around two commands (vv 1, 8) that determine our relationship to those “in the world” who have power or authority over us.

Verses 1-7, Governing Authority

Reading verses 1-2 in your English translation, you might miss the wordplay that Paul employs. His argument revolves around two Greek words:

- *exousia* – delegated authority, the right to speak in the name of the king/emperor
- *tassō* – institution or placement, the act of establishing something

Here is a diagram with the Greek word order. *Exousia* words are in blue, and *tassō* words are in green.



This is very definitely Roman language, meant to convey the institution of “secular” or “worldly” authority. Where Paul deviates from the expected hierarchy is his use of the term “servant of God” (v 4) to describe the ruling power.

So, here is the big question. Is Paul’s statement to be taken literally? Or is Paul making a very nuanced, subtle argument for *when* the church should defy human authority? Some interpreters see Romans as actually subversive, undermining the authority of the Roman emperor in favor of our service to Christ.

- Who defines the idea of “good”? Does the government?
- Why doesn’t Paul address the idea of a “right” (like “the right of free speech”, etc.)?
- What are the standards for determining when a believer might need to refuse to submit to governmental authority?
- Does God appoint unjust authorities as well as just ones?

Paul uses the idea of taxes and debts as a transition to dealing with relationships to people outside the church who are our peers – those we might borrow money from. He is not talking about banking institutions or credit cards. Such things did not exist.

Verses 8-14

- When Paul talks about “fulfilling the law,” where would he have gotten this idea?
- The word for “wrong” in verse 10 is the same word translated as “bad” in verse 3. How is Paul tying these two sections together?
- Reading verse 11-14, what is Paul’s purpose in writing this whole chapter? Is he directing believers to abide by the law and behave morally as the means, or is there something more important underlying the instruction?

Notice the martial language (“the armor of light,” verse 12) and the call to open practice of our faith (“let us walk properly in the daylight,” verse 13) in Paul’s conclusion.

- What balance is Paul asking believers to strike in their relationship to those outside of the church?
- There are three ideas here that must be held in tension:
 1. Submission
 2. Love
 3. Honesty

How are these reflections of the core idea expressed in 12:21?

How do we see these values expressed in Jesus’s life and ministry in the gospels?