

THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO SECULAR POWERS

Paul deals in a very direct way in Romans 13 with the Christian and his relationship with secular authority.

Verses 1-2 establish the fact that secular powers exist with God's intent and provision. This fact was made dramatically evident four times to King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:21 and Daniel 4:17, 25, 32) and once to Belshazzar (Daniel 5:21).

Verses 3-5 comment on the purpose of their existence. Peter extends the thought when he writes, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:13-14).

Verses 6-7 explain that our responsibility to those in authority is expressed through obedience and in the payment of taxes. Jesus beautifully demonstrated this in the incident about the fish and tribute in Matthew 17:24-27. He further clarified the matter in Matthew 22:17-21 where He stated, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

In addition to these observations, something especially noteworthy is evident in Romans 13:1-7. Verses 1-3 make reference to "higher powers...powers that be...rulers...the power...the same." Beginning with verse 4, Paul refers to those in authority as "he" (verse 4) and "they" (Verse 6) and to the beneficiaries of their services as "thee" (verse 4), "thou" (verse 4), "ye" (verse 5), and "you" is understood in verse 7.

Note the contrast, therefore, in who is to do the ruling and who is to receive the benefit. The manner of expression here unmistakably shows that we who serve God are intended to be blessed by those whom He has placed in secular control for our well-being. The contrast is between those who are Christians and those who serve where a Christian cannot. Those in authority are used by God in exercising a role which is forbidden us - that of vengeance, violence, and enforcing of secular law.