

## D. THE CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR RULERS (13:1–7)

1 Every person is to be submissive to the governing authorities.<sup>262</sup> For there is no authority except by God, and the existing authorities have been appointed by God. 2 So that the one who resists the authority is resisting the ordinance of God. And those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For the rulers are not p 808 a cause of fear to the good work but to the bad. Now do you want to avoid fear of the authority? Do good, and you will receive praise from him. 4 For he is God's servant for you, for the good. But if you do what is bad, fear. For he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is God's servant, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices what is bad.

5 Therefore it is necessary to be submissive, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For also, because of this, you are paying taxes. For they are servants of God, devoted to this very thing. 7 Pay back to everyone what you owe: taxes, to whom you owe taxes; custom duties to whom you owe custom duties; respect to whom you owe respect; honor to whom you owe honor.

In contrast to the loosely connected series of exhortations in 12:9–21, we find in 13:1–7 a coherent and well-organized argument about a single topic: the need for submission to governing authorities. This argument comes on the scene quite abruptly, with no explicit syntactical connection with what has come before it<sup>263</sup>—and not much evidence of any connection in subject matter either. In fact, vv. 8–10, highlighting the centrality of love for the Christian ethic, seem to relate to vv. 9–21, which also focus on love and its outworkings. When we add to these points the allegedly un-Pauline vocabulary of the passage, it is no surprise that some scholars think a redactor has added 13:1–7 to Paul's original letter to the Romans.<sup>264</sup> Other scholars do not go so far.

<sup>262</sup> The valuable early P<sup>46</sup>, along with a significant part of the western MS tradition (the original hand of D, F, and G), read πάσαις ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτάσσεσθε, “be submissive to all the governing authorities.” The variant does not have sufficient external support to be considered seriously (UBS<sup>5</sup> gives the usual text an “A” rating, indicating the editors thought it was “certain”; in any case, the meaning is not affected).

<sup>263</sup> E.g., there are no particles or conjunctions in 13:1 to link this and the following verses to the end of chap. 12. Such a situation (asyndeton) is relatively unusual in Greek.

They think that Paul himself included this section here but that he was quoting an already developed Christian tradition. On either view, however, [Rom. 13:1–7](#) is viewed as an “alien body” within [12:1–13:14](#).<sup>265</sup> Not only does it interrupt Paul’s elaboration of the nature and centrality of love, but it seems to give unqualified endorsement to an institution that belongs to an age that is “passing away” ([13:11–14](#)) and to which we are not to be conformed ([12:2](#)).

But Paul’s teaching about the transitory nature of this world might be precisely why he includes [13:1–7](#). His purpose may be to stifle the kind of extremism that would pervert his emphasis on the coming of a new era and on the “new creation” into a rejection of every human and societal convention—including the government. Paul has had to respond to such extremism before. In fact, Paul writes to the Romans from the city in which this extremism appears to have had its boldest manifestation: Corinth (see [1 Corinthians](#)). One can well imagine Christians arguing: “The old age has passed away; we are ‘a new creation in [p 809](#) Christ’ and belong to the transcendent, spiritual realm. Surely we, who are even now reigning with Christ in his kingdom, need pay no attention to the secular authorities of this defunct age.” If [Rom. 13:1–7](#) is responding to such an attitude, Paul may have inserted it here as a guard against those who might draw the wrong conclusions from his concern that Christians avoid conformity to “[this age](#).” For all that is present in the world around us is not part of “[this age](#),” or at least not part of it in the same way. To the degree that [this age](#) is dominated by Satan and sin, Christians must resolutely refuse to adopt its values. But the world in which Christians continue to live out their bodily existence (see [12:1](#)) has not been wholly abandoned by God. As a manifestation of his common grace, God has established in this world certain institutions, such as marriage and government, that have a positive role to play even after the inauguration of the new age.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>265</sup> The phrase is Käsemann’s (352). See also Michel, 393–94.

<sup>266</sup> This explanation for [Rom. 13:1–7](#) was common in the early church (see, e.g., [Chrysostom, Homily 23](#) [p. 511]; Pelagius, 136) and is also held, in a variety of forms, by a number of modern scholars; see esp. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 320–23; Wilckens, “Römer 13,1–7,” 226–30; Käsemann, 350–51 (the text counters “enthusiasts”); Nygren, 426–27; Fitzmyer, 663; Byrne, 386–87; R. Walker, *Studie zu Römer 13,1–7*, 57–58; Schlier, “State,” 229–30; Schrage, *Christen und Staat*, 51–52;

Recognizing how Paul's teaching about the need for Christians to respect governing authorities in 13:1–7 fits into his overall theology of the Christian's life in this world helps explain its presence at this point in Paul's exhortations. Submission to government is another aspect of that "good" which the Christian, seeking to "approve" the will of God, will exemplify (see 12:2).<sup>267</sup> The specific contextual trigger for Paul's teaching about government and its role in this world may have been 12:19. Forbidding the Christian from taking vengeance and allowing God to exercise this right in the last judgment might lead one to think that God was letting evildoers have their way in this world. Not so, says Paul in 13:1–7: for God, through governing authorities, is even now inflicting wrath on evildoers (vv. 3–4).<sup>268</sup>

I think these considerations are sufficient to explain why Paul includes 13:1–7 in his letter to the Romans. But many scholars are not convinced of this. They think that there must have been a situation in the church at Rome, of which Paul was aware, that led him to include this exhortation. Scholars have proposed p 810 several scenarios,<sup>269</sup> but the most likely is that the Roman Christians had been infected by their fellow citizens with a resistance to paying taxes to an increasingly rapacious Roman government.<sup>270</sup> It would

<sup>267</sup> Heiligenthal, "Strategien konformer Ethik," 57; Wilckens, "Römer 13,1–7," 209–10; Furnish, *Moral Teaching*, 126; Murray, 2.146; Delling, *Römer 13,1–7*, 67–68.

<sup>268</sup> Wilckens, "Römer 13,1–7," 209–10; Barrett, "New Testament Doctrine," 14–15; S-H, 366. De Kruijf ("Literary Unity," 319–26) argues that Paul marks off 12:17–13:7 as an integral unit about relationships with outsiders; see also Viard, 273.

<sup>269</sup> Many scholars cite the violent anti-Roman Jewish Zealot movement as a possible influence on the Christians in Rome—a tendency that the Christians must resist if they are not to be identified, and condemned, with the Jewish community (see Bammel, "Romans 13," 366–75; Borg, "New Context for Romans XIII," 205–18; Culpepper, "God's Righteousness," 456–57; Calvin, 477; Harrison, 136). However, as Käsemann notes (350), there is little evidence for Zealot or Zealot-like agitation in Rome at this date. Moiser suggests that Claudius's expulsion of Jews (and Jewish Christians) in A.D. 49 might have led to resentment against the state and the temptation to rebel against it ("Rethinking Romans 12–15," 571–82).

<sup>270</sup> The Roman historian Tacitus refers to resistance against the payment of indirect taxes in the middle 50s, culminating in a tax revolt in A.D. 58 (*Ann.* 13.50ff.). If Paul knew of these tendencies,

be because of this background that Paul concludes his teaching about submission to government with a plea to pay taxes (vv. 6–7). While the evidence for a tax rebellion in Rome as early as 56–57 (the date of Romans) is not as clear and abundant as we might like, there might be something in this suggestion. But it can hardly be the main basis for Paul’s teaching; after all, in v. 6b, he does not exhort the Romans to pay their taxes, but commends them for doing so.<sup>271</sup> It is possible, then, that Paul concludes his teaching on this matter with a reference to paying taxes, because then, as now, this was the most pervasive and obvious expression of subservience to the state. It is also possible that Paul includes this topic here because of his continuing dependence on the teaching of Jesus. It was, of course, the issue of paying taxes that formed the basis for Jesus’ famous pronouncement about “rendering to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Mark 12:13–17 and pars.).<sup>272</sup>

Paul’s teaching also has a number of striking similarities to 1 Pet. 2:13–17.<sup>273</sup> This suggests that Jesus’ teaching about the relationship of the disciple p 811 to the state was the basis for a widespread early Christian tradition, which Paul here takes up and adapts.<sup>274</sup> Paul certainly casts this tradition in language drawn from Greco-Roman government,<sup>275</sup> and submission to government was certainly encouraged in many

<sup>271</sup> See Wilckens, 3.34; K. Weiss, *TDNT* 9.82–83.

<sup>272</sup> Krauter (*Studien*, 55–160) examines various proposals that posit behind 13:1–7 a specific situation in Rome and finds each of them lacking adequate historical and/or textual basis.

<sup>273</sup> The 1 Peter text has a number of key words and concepts in common with Rom. 13:1–7: ὑποτάσσω (“order under, submit”) as the basic command; ὑπερέχω (“supreme”), used to denote governing powers; the purpose of government as being ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν (“taking vengeance on evildoers”) and ἔπαινον ἀγαθοποιῶν (“giving praise to doers of good”); the exhortation to give “honor” (τιμάω) and “fear” (φοβέομαι). See also 1 Tim. 2:1–2, which commands believers to pray for kings and “all those placed over [ὑπεροχῆ] us, in order that we might lead a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and godliness”; and Tit. 3:1, which exhorts us to “submit” (ὑποτάσσεσθαι) to “rulers, authorities” (ἀρχαῖς, ἐξουσίαις).

<sup>274</sup> A. Webster, “St. Paul’s Political Advice,” 262–73; Wilckens, 2.39–40; idem, “Römer 13:1–7,” 211–14; Friedrich, Pöhlmann, and Stuhlmacher, “Zur historischen Situation,” 134–35; Michel, 396–97.

Greco-Roman circles.<sup>276</sup> But, as is usually the case, the concepts Paul teaches here have their roots in the OT and Judaism.<sup>277</sup>

The line of thought in the paragraph is as follows<sup>278</sup>:

General command: “submit to the authorities” (v. 1a)

First reason (“for”) for submission: they are appointed by God (v. 1b)

Consequences (“so that”) of resisting the authorities: God’s judgment (v. 2)

Second reason (“for”) for submission: rulers are God’s servants to reward good and punish evil (vv. 3–4)

Reiteration (“therefore”) of general command, with abbreviated reference to reasons for submission (v. 5):

“because of [fear of] wrath” and

“because of conscience”

Appeal to practice: the Roman Christians are paying taxes (v. 6)

Specific command (“because of this”): pay your taxes and respect the authorities! (v. 7)

1 Paul gets right to the point: “Every person is to be submissive to the governing authorities.” In typical OT and Jewish fashion, Paul uses *psychē* (sometimes translated “soul”—KJV; NKJV) to denote not one “part” of a human being (soul in distinction from body or spirit) but the whole person. The translation “every person” (NRSV; ESV; NASB; CEB) or “everyone” (NIV; [p 812](#) CSB; NLT; NJB) is therefore accurate.<sup>279</sup> The basis of

<sup>276</sup> Engberg-Pedersen (“Paul’s Stoicizing Politics,” 163–72) notes similarities between Rom. 13:1–7 and the Stoic Seneca, in *De Clementia* 1.1–4.

<sup>277</sup> Wilckens, “Römer 13,1–7,” 223–26; see also Friedrich, Pöhlmann, and Stuhlmacher, “Zur historischen Situation,” 135–46, who stress Paul’s indebtedness to both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions. It must be noted, on the other hand, that Rom. 13:1–7 lacks many of the typical features of Jewish treatments of the state (e.g., emphasis on martyrdom; see Neugebauer, “Zur Auslegung,” 152–59). This does not invalidate Paul’s dependence on the OT and Jewish teaching, but it shows that he has selected only the most basic of their teachings.

<sup>278</sup> This differs in only a couple of points from the analysis of Stein, “Argument,” 325–43.

<sup>279</sup> See also Rom. 2:9; Acts 2:43; 3:23; Rev. 16:3.

Paul’s own authority—an apostle of the gospel—as well as the audience of the letter indicates that his immediate reference must be to Christians. But we should probably not limit the reference to Christians. Submission to governing authorities is especially incumbent on Christians who recognize that the God they serve stands behind those authorities, but it is required even for those who do not know this.<sup>280</sup>

“Governing authorities” (see also [NRSV](#); [NIV](#); [NASB](#); [NJB](#)) translates a phrase that is central to the interpretation of the paragraph. Like our “authority,” *exousia* refers broadly in secular and biblical Greek to the possession and exercise of (usually legitimate) power. As an abstract noun, the word usually denotes the concept of authority. Jesus’ well-known words in [Matt. 28:18](#) use the word in a typical way: “All *authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” But the word can also have a concrete application, in which case *exousia* denotes a sphere over which authority is exercised (e.g., a “dominion”; see [Luke 23:7](#)) or the being who exercises authority.<sup>281</sup> Paul obviously uses the word in the last sense. The [NT](#) refers to two different kinds of beings who exercise authority: a person in authority (usually a governmental “ruler”)<sup>282</sup> and spiritual powers.<sup>283</sup> A few scholars have argued that Paul may be referring at least

<sup>280</sup> Wilckens; Fitzmyer; Stein, “Argument,” 326; R. Walker, *Studie zu Römer 13,1–7*, 8, 11–12; contra, e.g., Cranfield.

<sup>281</sup> The word ἐξουσία occurs approximately 72 times in the [LXX](#) and 93 in the [NT](#). The large majority of occurrences are abstract (as in [Matt. 28:18](#)) and, as one might expect, in the singular. In the [LXX](#), only [Dan. 3:2](#) and [7:27](#) use ἐξουσία in the plural with a concrete application. The meaning of the word in [Dan. 3:2](#) is uncertain, while in [7:27](#) it refers to spheres of authority, e.g., “dominions.” See also [Luke 23:7](#): Jesus was from “the authority [ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας] of Herod.”

<sup>282</sup> See [Luke 12:11](#)—“When you are brought before synagogues [τὰς συναγωγὰς], rulers [τὰς ἀρχάς] and authorities [τὰς ἐξουσίας], do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say”—and [Tit. 3:1](#): “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities” (ἀρχαῖς ἐξουσίαις; it is not clear if [NIV](#) here follows the variant text, ἀρχαῖς καὶ ἐξουσίαις). This same meaning of the plural ἐξουσίαις is found in secular Greek (see the references in G. Foerster, [TDNT](#) 2.563 nn. 16 and 17) and in [Josephus \(J.W. 2.350\)](#).

<sup>283</sup> See [Eph. 3:10](#); [6:12](#); [Col. 1:16](#); [2:15](#); [1 Pet. 3:22](#); and, in the singular, [Eph. 1:21](#) and [Col. 2:10](#). In all but the 1 Peter text, ἐξουσία(ι) is paralleled with ἀρχή/αί. This use of ἐξουσία does not seem to have

partially to spiritual beings in [Rom. 13:1](#).<sup>284</sup> p 813 But this is unlikely.<sup>285</sup> As parallel terms in this context suggest (see “rulers” [*archontes*] in [v. 3](#)), the “authorities” occupy positions in secular government. Paul qualifies them as “governing” in order to indicate

<sup>284</sup> This identification was apparently first proposed by Dibelius (*Geisterwelt*), though he later retracted it (see “Rom und die Christen,” 177–228). It was accepted and developed by several other scholars (e.g., Schmidt, “Gegenüber,” 1–16; Dehn, “Engel und Obrigkeit,” 90–109; idem, *Vom christlichen Leben*, 72; Cranfield, “Some Observations on Romans 13:1–7,” 241–49 [retracted in his commentary]), but attained considerable attention through its advocacy by K. Barth (*Church and State*, 23–36) and Cullmann (*State in the New Testament*, 55–70). See also Morrison, *Powers That Be*, who emphasizes the degree to which the material and the spiritual were intertwined in the 1st century; and Wink, who, while recognizing the difficulty of lexical identification, nevertheless thinks that spiritual powers would have been part of Paul’s conception of the secular rulers he discusses in [Rom. 13](#) (*Naming the Powers*, 45–47). The importance of the lexical point is that it provides for these scholars both a christological basis for Paul’s exhortation and an implicit justification for disobedience of the state. They argue as follows: As was typical in the ancient world, Paul assumed that behind the secular governing authorities stood angelic beings. This conceptual context, coupled with the lexical evidence that Paul uses ἐξουσία in the plural to refer to spiritual beings (the exception is [Tit. 3:1](#), which most of these scholars would not in any case consider Pauline), justifies us in thinking that Paul intends a double reference with ἐξουσίαι in [Rom. 13:1](#): both the human rulers and the spiritual beings that stand behind them. Ultimately, then, the Christian’s submission to “the authorities” must be seen in light of Christ’s subduing of these authorities. We are justified in obeying them as long as they recognize and manifest the fact of their subjection; but when they rebel against this subjection, we Christians are justified in ignoring them.

<sup>285</sup> Four points, in particular, are fatal to the Barth-Cullmann approach. (1) When ἐξουσίαι refers to spiritual beings in Paul, it always occurs with ἀρχαί. The omission of the latter in [Rom. 13:1](#) calls into question the value of the lexical parallels. (2) Other terms in [Rom. 13:1–7](#) that are parallel to ἐξουσίαι cannot have such a double meaning (see ἄρχοντες in [v. 3](#); διάκονος in [v. 4](#)). Paul throughout the passage uses terms drawn from Greco-Roman government and administration, and we would expect ἐξουσίαι to have a similar background (see, e.g., Strobel, “Zum Verständnis von Rm 13,” 67–79). (3) The attempt to introduce a christological basis for Paul’s exhortation is to

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that they are in positions of superiority over the believers he is addressing.<sup>286</sup>

p 814 Paul calls on believers to “submit”<sup>287</sup> to governing authorities rather than to “obey” them; and Paul’s choice of words may be important to our interpretation and application of Paul’s exhortation. To submit is to recognize one’s subordinate place in a hierarchy, to acknowledge as a general rule that certain people or institutions have authority over us. In addition to governing authorities (see also [Tit. 3:1](#)), Paul urges Christians to submit to their spiritual leaders ([1 Cor. 16:16](#)) and to “one another” ([Eph. 5:21](#)); and he calls on Christian slaves to submit to their masters ([Tit. 2:9](#)), Christian prophets to submit to other prophets ([1 Cor. 14:32](#)), and Christian wives to submit to their husbands ([1 Cor. 14:34](#) [?]; [Eph. 5:24](#); [Col. 3:18](#); [Tit. 2:5](#)).<sup>288</sup> It is this general posture toward government that Paul demands here of Christians. And such a posture will usually demand that we obey what the governing authorities tell us to do. But perhaps our submission to government is compatible with disobedience to government in certain exceptional circumstances. For heading the hierarchy of relations in which Christians find themselves is God; and all subordinate “submissions” must always be measured in relationship to our all-embracing submission to him.<sup>289</sup>

<sup>286</sup> See [1 Tim. 2:2](#), οἱ ἐν ὑπεροχῇ, “those who have power” (see also [Wis. 6:5](#)). This explanation, which takes ὑπερεχούσαις to have comparative force (the authorities “surpass” or “excel” [ὑπερέχω] the believer), is preferable to taking the word as a superlative (which would suggest that Paul refers to the superior “authorities,” e.g., the highest Roman authorities [so, e.g., Krauter, *Studien*, 173–79]; see, perhaps, [1 Pet. 2:13](#)); for this perspective, see Godet; Cranfield; contra Barrett; Black. See also Judge, who suggests that ἐξουσίαι might denote those in government who were particularly in contact with the Christians (“Cultural Conformity,” 9–10); Jewett thinks the reference is to local magistrates.

<sup>287</sup> The verb is ὑποτάσσω. The specific form here, ὑποτασσεσθω, could be middle (see G. Delling, *TDNT* 8.42; Murray), but it is probably passive since the aorist form of the verb is always passive (see *BDAG*; Cranfield).

<sup>288</sup> Paul also uses ὑποτάσσω of the relationship of people to the law ([Rom. 8:7](#)), of creation to “vanity” ([Rom. 8:20](#)), of Jews (negatively) to the righteousness of God ([Rom. 10:3](#)), and (with allusion to [Ps. 8:6](#)), of “all things” to Christ ([1 Cor. 15:27–28](#); [Eph. 1:22](#); [Phil. 3:21](#)). The verb also occurs in [Luke 2:51](#); [10:17](#), [20](#); [Heb. 2:5](#), [8](#); [12:9](#); [Jas. 4:7](#); [1 Pet. 2:13](#), [18](#); [3:1](#), [5](#), [22](#); [5:5](#).

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Verse 1b gives the reason<sup>290</sup> why we are to submit to governing authorities: “there is no authority except by God, and the existing authorities have been appointed<sup>291</sup> by God.”<sup>292</sup> In light of *exousiai* in v. 1a, “authority” will refer p 815 to the individual human ruler.<sup>293</sup> Paul’s insistence that no ruler wields power except through God’s appointment reflects standard OT and Jewish teaching. Daniel tells the proud pagan king Nebuchadnezzar that God was teaching him that “the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people” (4:17).<sup>294</sup> Paul’s dependence on this tradition and his all-inclusive language (“there is no authority except”) make clear that he is asserting a universally applicable truth about the ultimate origin of rulers. From a human perspective, rulers come to power through force or heredity or popular choice. But the “transformed mind” recognizes behind every such process the hand of God. Paul brings home this

<sup>290</sup> See γάρ.

<sup>291</sup> τάσσω, “appoint, order, put someone over”; see Matt. 28:16; Luke 7:8; Acts 13:48; 15:2; 22:10; 28:23; 1 Cor. 16:15.

<sup>292</sup> The presence of the preposition ὑπό in both clauses suggests that we should read back into the first clause a form of the verb τάσσω, which Paul uses in the second clause. The connection between the command of v. 1a and its basis in v. 1b through the use of words built on the ταν- stem—ὑποτασθέντων-τεταγμένοι (perfect passive from τάσσω)—should be noted (see also ἀντιτασσόμενος and διαταγή in v. 2).

<sup>293</sup> Contra Chrysostom, who thinks that ἐξουσία denotes the principle of rulership and that Paul is therefore not affirming the divine origin of every human ruler.

<sup>294</sup> See the similar refrain in 4:25, 32; 5:21; also 1 Sam. 12:8; Jer. 1:7, 10; 27:5–6; Dan. 2:21, 37–38; Prov. 8:15–16; Isa. 41:2–4; 45:1–7. Post-OT Jewish sources are just as explicit. See Wis. 6:1–3:

Listen, therefore, O kings, and understand; learn, O judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, you that rule over multitudes, and boast of many nations. For your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans.

See also Josephus, *J.W.* 2.140: “no ruler attains his office save by the will of God”; *Sir.* 4:27; 10:4; 17:7; 1 En. 46:5; *Let. Aris.* 224; 2 Bar. 82:9; and see Str-B, 3.303–4.

general principle in the last clause of the verse.<sup>295</sup> The believers in Rome are to recognize that the specific governmental officials with whom they have dealings<sup>296</sup>—“the ones that now exist,”<sup>297</sup> as Paul puts it—are “appointed,” or “ordained,” by God.

2 In v. 1a Paul has stated a positive consequence of God’s appointment of human rulers: we are to submit to them. Now he asserts two related negative consequences<sup>298</sup> of the same theological truth. Since God has appointed human rulers, the person who opposes them is “in a state of rebellion against”<sup>299</sup> the “ordinance” of God.<sup>300</sup> And such opposition will ultimately lead to eternal condemnation. p 816 As submission denotes a recognition of government’s position over the Christian by God’s appointment, so resistance is the refusal to acknowledge the authority of government.<sup>301</sup> It denotes the attitude of one who will not admit that government has a legitimate right to exercise

<sup>295</sup> The δέ introducing it is probably ascensive: “and even” (see Godet).

<sup>296</sup> Judge (“Cultural Conformity,” 9–10) suggests that the ἐξουσίαι are the officials who administer authority (an authority derived from the ἀρχαί). Zsifkovits (*Staatsgedanke*, 64–65) notes that ἐξουσία translates *Lat. potestates*, a term that broadly covered a range of Roman government officials.

<sup>297</sup> αἱ οὖσαι, “the ones being.”

<sup>298</sup> See ὥστε, “so that,” “as a consequence.”

<sup>299</sup> The verb is the perfect ἀνθέστηκεν, connoting a state of resistance (see Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 396).

<sup>300</sup> “Ordained” and “ordinance” capture the wordplay in Greek between τεταγμένοι in v. 1b and διαταγή in v. 2. The word διαταγή occurs once in the LXX (*Ezra 4:11*) and once elsewhere in the NT (*Acts 7:53*; see διατάσσω, “ordain,” in *Gal. 3:19*). The word refers to the act of God’s appointment, not to an eternal “ordinance” of God (see R. Walker, *Studie zu Römer 13,1–7*, 23). Schlier suggests that Paul may intend a certain irony here since he claims that the word was used of the “orders” that rulers issue; Paul would therefore be saying, in effect, that the rulers themselves are “under orders.” But Wilckens questions whether the word is used this way.

<sup>301</sup> Paul uses two different verbs for this concept in the clause: ἀντιτάσσω, “oppose,” “resist” (only here and in *Acts 18:6*, *Jas. 4:6*, and *1 Pet. 5:5* [the latter quoting *Prov. 3:34*] in the NT); and ἀνθίστημι, which cannot be distinguished in meaning here from the former.

authority over him or her. Those who take up this attitude<sup>302</sup> “will bring judgment on themselves.”<sup>303</sup> “Bringing judgment”<sup>304</sup> could refer to the action of the secular ruler, with the implication (spelled out in [v. 4b](#)) that God’s own judgment is present in the punishment meted out by the ruler.<sup>305</sup> But Paul’s argument has not advanced this far. It is better to understand the judgment here to be the eschatological judgment of God: those who persistently oppose secular rulers, and hence the will of God, will suffer condemnation for that opposition.<sup>306</sup>

[3–4](#) If “bring judgment” in [v. 2b](#) refers to a historical judgment that is mediated by the secular rulers, than [vv. 3–4](#) could further explain this situation.<sup>307</sup> But if the judgment of [v. 2b](#) is God’s final judgment, then we must view [vv. 3–4](#) as a second reason why Christians are to submit to governing authorities.<sup>308</sup> Not only has God appointed them ([v. 1b](#)), but he has also entrusted to them an important role in maintaining order in society. By punishing those who do wrong and rewarding those who do good, secular rulers are carrying out [p 817](#) God’s purposes in the world. Christians, therefore, are to submit to the secular rulers. For “rulers,”<sup>309</sup> Paul explains, are not a “cause of fear”<sup>310</sup> to

<sup>302</sup> The perfect participle ἀνθεστηκότες connotes a persistent refusal to recognize government’s role in the divine hierarchy (and not just an occasional failure), as is clear not so much from the tense as from the context (see Dunn). Note [Eph. 6:13](#) for a similar use of the verb.

<sup>303</sup> “Against themselves” reflects the decision to take ἑαυτοῖς as a dative of disadvantage (BDF §188[2]).

<sup>304</sup> The phrase κρίμα λήμψονται, “receive judgment,” is a Semitism (Black; see also [Mark 12:40](#); [Luke 20:47](#); [Jas. 3:1](#)).

<sup>305</sup> S-H; Godet; Calvin; Murray; Cranfield; Schreiner; Jewett; Zsifkovits, *Staatsgedanke*, 72–73; Merklein, “Sinn und Zweck,” 245.

<sup>306</sup> Wilckens; Dunn; Michel; Stein, “Argument,” 331–32; Dellling, *Römer* 13,1–7, 64–65. Four of the five other occurrences of κρίμα in Romans refer to eschatological judgment ([2:2](#), [3](#); [3:8](#); [5:16](#); the exception is [11:33](#), where the reference is to God’s acts in history).

<sup>307</sup> Verses [3–4](#) might then explain the judgment of [v. 2b](#) (Meyer) or the prerogative of rulers to exercise that judgment (Haldane; Murray); or it might elaborate further the concept of a divinely ordained society (Dunn).

<sup>308</sup> Calvin; Cranfield; Stein, “Argument,” 332–33.

those who are persistent in doing good<sup>311</sup> but only to those who do evil. Christians need only do the good that they are called to do under the gospel (see 12:2, 9, 17, and 21) if they want to avoid fear of the authorities.<sup>312</sup> In fact, Paul concludes, doing good will not only bring freedom from fear; it will even result in praise from the rulers.<sup>313</sup>

Verse 4 is framed by two assertions in which Paul characterizes the ruler as a “servant of God.” The first elaborates the positive function of the ruler—praising those who do good—which Paul has described in v. 3b. The second explains the negative function of the ruler—punishing evil—which Paul touched on in v. 3 and explains in more detail in v. 4b. In both these functions, the secular ruler is carrying out God’s purposes, as his *diakonos*. Paul usually uses this word to refer to a Christian in his capacity as a willing “servant,” or “minister,” of the Lord and of other Christians. But people can also “serve” God, his purposes, and his people unconsciously. So it is with secular rulers, who, appointed by p 818 God (v. 1b), “administer” justice in keeping with divine standards of

<sup>311</sup> The Greek is τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ, “the good work.” As in 2:7, the phrase probably has a collective sense (S-H), and the context suggests that it is a personification (Murray). The same observations will apply also to τῷ κακῷ.

<sup>312</sup> The clause θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν could be conditional—“if you wish not to fear the authority?...” (see NJB; BDF §471[3]; N. Turner, *Syntax*, 319; Barrett)—or a question—“do you wish not to fear the authority?...” (most English translations; S-H; Murray; Dunn). Syntax does not decide the matter, and either fits perfectly well in the context.

<sup>313</sup> A few interpreters have thought that the “praise” (ἔπαινος) is from God (e.g., Origen, Augustine, Pelagius; see Zsifkovits, *Staatsgedanke*, 78–80; R. Walker, *Studie zu Römer 13,1–7*, 36–37), but the antithetical parallel to “fear” (which is clearly fear of the secular ruler) requires that it be the ruler who bestows the praise. Paul may be thinking specifically of the practice of Roman authorities of publishing on inscriptions the names of “benefactors” of society (see, e.g., Käsemann; Wilckens; Schlier; van Unnik, “Lob und Strafe,” 334–43; Heiligenthal, *Werke als Zeugen*, 107–8). This being the case, Paul might intend the “doing good” in this verse to refer specifically to the activities of Christians as “good citizens” in the societies where they live (see Strobel, “Zum Verständnis von Rm 13,” 79; Winter, “Public Honouring of Christian Benefactors,” 87–103). While public benefaction should not be eliminated from the reference, the broader context of Rom. 12–13 suggests that it cannot be limited to this either.

right and wrong.<sup>314</sup> On the positive side, rulers, by bestowing praise (v. 3b), encourage Christians to do what is good (v. 4a).<sup>315</sup>

Paul now turns again to the negative role of the ruler, showing why he is a “cause of fear” to those who do evil (see v. 3a). It is because the ruler “does not bear the sword in vain.” Scholars have argued about the exact background and significance of the phrase “bear the sword,” but none of the specific connotations suggested seems to be well established.<sup>316</sup> Probably, then, Paul uses the phrase to refer generally to the right of the

<sup>314</sup> The word *διάκονος* was used in secular Greek to denote a civic official (MM); see its application to court officials in *Esth.* 1:10; 2:2; 6:3; and to King Nebuchadnezzar in *Jer.* 25:9. See also *Wis.* 6:4. The outstanding OT example is, of course, the pagan king Cyrus (*Isa.* 45:1). The idea that secular rulers administer divine justice is not confined to Jewish or Christian circles; see, e.g., Plutarch, “Rulers are ministers of God for the care and safety of mankind, that they may distribute or hold in safe keeping the blessings and benefits which God gives to man” (*Ad principem ineruditum* 5.13.22–14.2, quoted in Black). In light of this evidence, the argument about whether *διάκονος* here has a purely secular meaning (e.g., Käsemann) or a quasi-religious meaning (e.g., Barrett) is moot. The word *means* “servant,” “minister,” and no more; it is the qualifying genitive *θεοῦ* that indicates the ultimately “religious” significance of this service.

<sup>315</sup> This interpretation of σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν assumes that σοί is a dative of advantage dependent on θεοῦ διάκονος—“he is God’s servant *for your benefit*”—and that εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν is equivalent to a purpose clause, with “you” as the understood subject (see Michel; Wilckens; Delling, *Römer* 13,1–7, 58–59). This reading is preferable to the usual interpretation (reflected in most English translations) that the “good” is something bestowed on the believer by the government—either general peace and order (Dunn; Fitzmyer) or ultimate spiritual good (see *Rom.* 8:28; see Cranfield)—because ἀγαθός in the context always describes Christian behavior, as does its opposite, κακός.

<sup>316</sup> Several scholars point to the Roman *ius gladii*, the “authority (possessed by all higher magistrates) of inflicting sentence of death (see Tacitus, *Histories*, iii.68)” (Barrett; see also Michel; Lagrange; Leenhardt). But this practice seems to have been confined to the power of Roman provincial governors to condemn to death Roman citizens serving in the military (Sherwin-White, *Roman Society*, 8–11); it would hardly be relevant to the Roman Christians (see, e.g., Dunn). Others cite Philo’s use of *μαχαιροφόροι*, “sword-bearers,” to refer to Egyptian police

government to punish those who violate its laws.<sup>317</sup> For the purpose of his argument at this point, Paul is p 819 assuming that the laws of the state embody those general moral principles that are taught in the word of God.<sup>318</sup> The “evil” that the civil authorities punish, therefore, is evil in the absolute sense: those acts that God himself condemns as evil.<sup>319</sup> Only if this is so can we explain how Paul can see the government’s use of the sword as a manifestation of its role as “God’s servant.” At the same time, this suggests that the “wrath” that the governing authority inflicts on wrongdoers is God’s wrath.<sup>320</sup> When the civil authority punishes wrongdoers, the authority, acting as God’s servant, is “an instrument of vengeance”<sup>321</sup> through whom God is executing his wrath on human sin. For, as [Rom. 1:18](#) shows, the final eschatological outpouring of God’s wrath on sin is even now, in the course of human history, finding expression. The “vengeance” that is prohibited to individual Christians ([12:19](#)) is executed by God’s chosen servants, the secular authorities.

5 Paul sums up his argument in [vv. 1–4](#): “Therefore [[Gk. \*diō\*\]](#) it is necessary to be

<sup>317</sup> Friedrich, Pöhlmann, and Stuhlmacher, “Zur historischen Situation,” 140–44; Krauter, *Studien*, 204–5; Murray; Fitzmyer. The phrase does not, then, directly refer to the infliction of the death penalty; but in the context of first-century Rome, and against the OT background ([Gen. 9:4–6](#)), it is possible that Paul would have included the death penalty in the state’s panoply of punishments for wrongdoing (see, e.g., Murray; Dunn; Schreiner; Kruse).

<sup>318</sup> Why this is so, and why Paul fails to deal with those times when secular rulers do *not* enforce biblical morals but rather reward what is evil and punish what is good, will be discussed at the end of this paragraph.

<sup>319</sup> Wilckens; Cranfield; contra, e.g., Michel and Käsemann, who think that the reference is only to political/social offenses.

<sup>320</sup> See, e.g., Calvin; Michel; Murray; Käsemann; Dunn; contra, e.g., Schreiner; Delling, *Römer* 13,1–7, 59, who thinks that the wrath is the magistrate’s. Part of the background for Paul’s concept is the widespread OT teaching about God’s use of pagan nations and rulers for executing wrath (often on Israel); see [Isa. 5:26–29](#); [7:18–20](#); [8:7–8](#); [10:5–6](#); etc.

<sup>321</sup> ἔκδικος. BDAG translate here “agent of punishment” (see also [1 Thess. 4:6](#); [Wis. 12:12](#); [Sir. 30:6](#); [Josephus, J.W. 5.377](#)); see MM and Käsemann, who note the Hellenistic background for the word, where it can denote a “representative agent for wrath.”

submissive [to governmental authorities], not only<sup>322</sup> because of wrath but also because of conscience.” The two “because of” phrases summarize the reasons for submission that Paul has developed in vv. 1b–4. “Because of wrath” encapsulates Paul’s reminder in vv. 3–4 about the punitive function of secular rulers. It is the Christian’s recognition of this function, and the consequent fear of suffering wrath at the hands of the secular official, that should motivate submission (see NIV: “because of possible punishment”). But this is only the minor reason for Christian submission, as Paul’s “not only ... but also” sequence indicates. A more basic reason for Christian submission is “because of conscience.” “Conscience” refers to the believer’s knowledge of God’s will and purposes.<sup>323</sup> Christians know what Paul has just taught: that secular rulers p 820 are appointed by God (v. 1b) and that they function therefore as his servants (v. 4).<sup>324</sup> Christian submission to government is therefore no mere practical expedient, a means of avoiding punishment; it arises ultimately from insight into God’s providential ordering of human history.<sup>325</sup> Such submission is part of that “good, well-pleasing, and perfect” will of God discovered by the renewed mind (see also 1 Pet. 2:13, where the

<sup>322</sup> οὐ μόνον, οὐ (instead of the expected μή after the infinitive ὑποτάσσεσθαι) being used because of the stereotypical phrase (E. Burton, *Syntax*, §481).

<sup>323</sup> On Paul’s use of συνείδησις, see nn. 330 and 331 on 2:15. Based on the claim that “conscience” always has a retrospective function in Paul, Pierce (*Conscience*, 65–71) argues that “because of conscience” here means because one wants to avoid the painful knowledge that one has violated the will of God (see also R. Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*, 439–41). But it is not clear that Paul always uses the term this strictly; and it is probably better to think that conscience functions prospectively, as a guide to Christian conduct (Thrall, “Pauline Use of ΣΥΝΕΙΔΗΣΙΣ,” 624; Eckstein, *Begriff Syneidesis*, 291–300; Cranfield; Michel; Wilckens). Furthermore, as Dunn points out, a prospective significance of the phrase is clear however we translate. For a helpful overview of the word in Paul, see Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 640–44.

<sup>324</sup> Stein (“Argument,” 338–39) and Merklein (“Sinn und Zweck,” 250) suggest that “because of conscience” refers esp. to vv. 1b–2. But the phrase must certainly include reference as well to the important immediately preceding emphasis on the ruler as “God’s servant” (v. 4).

<sup>325</sup> “Necessity” (ἀνάγκη) frequently refers to a requirement that arises from God’s governance of the universe (W. Grundmann, *TDNT* 1.345–47; Zsifkovits, *Staatsgedanke*, 93–94).

believer is to submit to “every human institution” “because of the Lord”). “Not being conformed to this world” does not require Christians to renounce every institution now in place in society. For some of them—such as government and marriage—reflect God’s providential ordering of the world for our good and his glory.

6 “Because of this” could be parallel to the “therefore” at the beginning of [v. 5](#) and refer to [vv. 1b–4](#): because God has appointed secular rulers and they are his servants, “you are paying taxes.”<sup>326</sup> However, while it amounts to the same thing (since “conscience” summarizes these points from [vv. 1b–4](#)), it is better to see “because of this” picking up the immediately preceding phrase: “because of conscience” “you are paying taxes.”<sup>327</sup> A few commentators think that *teleite* might be an imperative: “you must pay taxes.”<sup>328</sup> But Paul’s addition of “for” (*Gk. gar*) to “because of this” shows rather conclusively that the verb must be an indicative, because Paul almost always uses this word to introduce the ground or explanation of a previous statement.<sup>329</sup> Here Paul is suggesting that the Roman Christians should acknowledge in their own habit of paying taxes to the government an implicit recognition of the authority that the government possesses over them.<sup>330</sup>

p 821 In the second part of the verse Paul reiterates the fact that this authority stems ultimately from God and that paying taxes is therefore a matter of “conscience.” Paul again calls secular rulers “servants of God” (see [v. 4](#)), but now he uses a different term, *leitourgos*. This word was used frequently in the [LXX](#) to refer to people who served in the temple,<sup>331</sup> and in the [NT](#) it always refers to those who are “ministering” for the sake of

<sup>326</sup> Stein, “Argument,” 340–41. Godet takes it with all of [vv. 1–5](#).

<sup>327</sup> Murray; Cranfield; R. Walker, *Studie zu Römer 13,1–7*, 49. Merklein (“Sinn und Zweck,” 251) thinks it refers to all of [v. 5](#).

<sup>328</sup> Zahn; Tholuck; Schmithals; see [NJB](#).

<sup>329</sup> See, e.g., Cranfield; Dunn. We have no syntactical basis for comparison since only here in the [NT](#) do we find the sequence *διὰ τοῦτο γάρ*.

<sup>330</sup> While probably indicative, then, the verb in its context carries a secondary imperative flavor: “For this reason you pay your taxes—you are right to do so and should continue to do so!” (Byrne).

<sup>331</sup> [Num. 4:37, 41; 1 Sam. 2:11, 18; 3:1; Ezra 7:24; Neh. 10:40; Isa. 61:6](#). However, the word refers more broadly to those who “serve” the Lord or his people in various ways ([Pss. 102:21; 103:4; 2](#)



the Lord.<sup>332</sup> Paul may therefore choose to use this word to indicate that secular rulers, even if unknowingly, are performing a religious function.<sup>333</sup> However, this view may be built on too slim a lexical basis: *leitourgos* outside the NT was often used in Paul's day to denote public officials of various kinds (see our "public servant").<sup>334</sup> In any case, as in the case of *diakonos* in v. 4, the addition "of God" makes clear the ultimately sacred nature of the "secular" ruler's "service."<sup>335</sup> Therefore the payment of taxes becomes a responsibility that the Christian owes to God himself. This is underscored in Paul's additional description of the rulers as those who "devote themselves<sup>336</sup> to this very thing."<sup>337</sup> Paul may think of the "thing" to which the rulers devote themselves as their promoting of good and restraining of evil (vv. 3–4),<sup>338</sup> their collecting of taxes (v. 6a),<sup>339</sup> or, perhaps most likely, their service itself ("servants of God").<sup>340</sup>

<sup>332</sup> The word *leitourgos* refers specifically to cultic "ministry" in Heb. 8:2; 10:11; and (probably) Rom. 15:16; and to "ministry" more generally in Phil. 2:25 and Heb. 1:7. The cognate *leitourgia* (from which we get the word "liturgy") denotes cultic service in Luke 1:23; Heb. 8:6; 9:21; and "ministry" generally in 2 Cor. 9:12; Phil. 2:17 (with sacrificial allusions), 30. The verb *leitourgeo* refers to ministry in general: Acts 13:2; Rom. 15:27; see also the adjective *leitourgos* in Heb. 1:14.

<sup>333</sup> Godet.

<sup>334</sup> See some of the LXX references noted above; and see Strobel, "Zum Verständnis von Rm 13," 86–87; Michel; Käsemann; Wilckens; Cranfield.

<sup>335</sup> Barrett.

<sup>336</sup> *προσκατεροῦντες* (the verb is also found in Mark 3:9; Acts 1:14; 2:42, 46; 6:4; 8:13; 10:7; Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2). The participle could be periphrastic, dependent on εἰσιν ("for the servants of God are appointed for this very thing"; see Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 479), but the importance of the designation of the rulers as "servants" makes it more likely that εἰσιν is independent.

<sup>337</sup> This translation, similar to most English translations, takes εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο with *προσκατεροῦντες*. It is rare (if not unprecedented) for this verb to be followed by εἰς (it usually takes the dative), but the alternative—to take εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο with *leitourgoi*, with *προσκατεροῦντες* independent ("servants for this very purpose, devoting themselves"; argued for by, e.g., Godet)—seems less likely (so most commentators).

<sup>338</sup> Barrett.

<sup>339</sup> E.g., Murray; Cranfield; Wilckens; Dunn; Fitzmyer; Porter, "Romans 13:1–7," 135.

Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

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<sup>p 822</sup> Verse 7 has no explicit link to the context, but its call for the discharge of one's obligations is probably intended to bring the general call for submission to rulers in vv. 1–6 to a practical conclusion. This makes it likely that the “everyone” to whom we are to “pay back” our obligations is limited by the context to secular officials and rulers.<sup>341</sup> By using the language of the discharge of a debt,<sup>342</sup> Paul suggests that the service that government renders to us places us under obligation to the various authorities. Paul spells out four kinds of obligations that we may owe to the authorities: direct taxes,<sup>343</sup> indirect taxes,<sup>344</sup> “respect,” and “honor.” Paul's call to “give back” taxes to the secular rulers is reminiscent of Jesus's demand that his disciples “give back to Caesar what is Caesar's” (Mark 12:17).<sup>345</sup> Since Jesus pairs this obligation to Caesar with our obligation to God—“give to God what is God's”—some interpreters think that Paul may do the same. They suggest that the fear we are to render might not be, as in vv. 3–4, terror of the punishment that the ruler might inflict, but reverence toward God himself.<sup>346</sup> However, the parallel traditions do not provide enough basis to find here an

<sup>341</sup> Godet; Käsemann; Murray; contra, e.g., Merklein, “Sinn und Zweck,” 252.

<sup>342</sup> ὀφειλή, “debt,” occurs often in the papyri with reference to financial debts; see Matt. 18:32. Paul uses the word once else to denote the sexual “obligation” owed by spouses to one another (1 Cor. 7:3). It is indistinguishable from ὀφείλημα in the NT (see Matt. 6:12 and Rom. 4:4). See F. Hauck, TDNT 5:564. The verb Paul uses—ἀποδίδωμι, “give back,” “repay”—fits well with this imagery of obligation.

<sup>343</sup> φόρος (= Lat. *tributa*). See the previous verse and Luke 20:22; 23:2.

<sup>344</sup> τέλος (= Lat. *portoria*), which also has this meaning in Matt. 17:25. “Indirect” taxes would include customs duties, fees for various services, etc. The two words for taxation that Paul uses here are found together in other texts (see BDAG; and Coleman, “Binding Obligations,” 313–15).

<sup>345</sup> See also the parallel texts in Matthew (22:21) and Luke (20:25); the verb in both cases is ἀπόδοτε (as also in the parallel texts in Matthew [22:21] and Luke [20:25]; Luke also uses the word φόρος [20:22]). Dependence on Jesus' teaching here is denied by some scholars (e.g., Käsemann; Fitzmyer), but it seems to be solidly established (see, e.g., F. Bruce, “Paul and ‘The Powers That Be,’” 92–93; Allison, “Pauline Epistles,” 16–17; M. B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 111–20; Stuhlmacher, “Jesustradition,” 248; Dunn, “Paul's Knowledge,” 202; Blomberg, “Quotations,” 134–35).

application of the word different from that in v. 3–4.<sup>347</sup> Nevertheless, as <sup>p</sup>823 suggested above, dependence on the gospel tradition, along with the perennial significance of taxation as *the* concrete sign of the authority of a state, probably does explain why Paul brings up the subject of taxes at the end of this paragraph.

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the history of the interpretation of [Rom. 13:1–7](#) is the history of attempts to avoid what seems to be its plain meaning. At first glance, and taken on its own, this passage seems to require that Christians always, in whatever situation, obey whatever their governmental leaders tell them to do. Almost all Christians recoil from this conclusion. Our own sad experience of situations like the [Holocaust](#) during World War II suggests that genuine Christian devotion to God must sometimes require *disobedience* of the government. Moreover, this sense finds support within the NT itself. The classic text is [Acts 5:29](#), in which Peter and John respond to the Jewish leaders’ order to stop teaching in [Jesus’](#) name: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (see also [Acts 4:18–20](#)). Equally important is the book of Revelation, in which keeping the commandments of God in the face of governmental pressure to the contrary is a key indication of our faithfulness to Christ.

Clearly, a willingness to resist the demands of secular rulers, when those conflict with the demand of the God we serve, is part of that transformation of life that Paul speaks about in these chapters. But how, then, can Paul apparently speak so absolutely about our need to “be submissive to the authorities”? Theologians and exegetes who have wrestled with this question have come up with several answers, which we will now survey briefly (moving from the least to the most likely).<sup>348</sup>

(1) Paul does not demand such submission at all. The text is a late addition to

<sup>347</sup> Murray; Käsemann; Dunn; Merklein, “Sinn und Zweck,” 253–54. The application of the language of “fear” (φόβος) and “honor” (τιμῆ) to the authorities in Paul’s day fits well with the social context of Paul’s teaching (see esp. Coleman, “Binding Obligations,” 315–25).

<sup>348</sup> For a history of interpretation, see Riekkinen, *Römer 13*, 2–202; Wilckens, 3.43–66; Krauter, *Studien*, 4–54; Pohle, *Christen und Staat*; W. Bauer, “‘Jedermann sie untertan der Obrigkeit,’” 262–84; Affeldt, *Weltliche Gewalt*; Lategan, “Reception,” 145–69. Molnar has illustrated a variety of attempts by late medieval commentators to avoid a universal application of the demand for submission (“Romains 13,” 231–40).

Romans, put in when the original radical demands of the gospel had been lost sight of and Christians were seeking accommodation with the world.<sup>349</sup> This desperate expedient has no textual basis.

(2) Paul is naive about the evil that governments might do or demand that we do. The apostle's experience with governmental authorities, as Acts makes clear, had been rather positive: on several occasions, secular rulers acknowledged Paul's right to preach the gospel. Moreover, Paul was writing Romans during the early years of Nero's reign, a period of Roman stability and good government (quite in contrast to Nero's later bizarre and anti-Christian behavior). But Paul knew the history of the often harsh treatment meted out to p 824 Israel by pagan nations, recorded both in the OT and in intertestamental Jewish literature. And he certainly knew that it was governmental leaders who put to death Jesus the Messiah, his Lord. Moreover, many of the Christians to whom he writes in Rome had recently been forced by the Roman emperor to leave their homes and businesses and live in exile. Surely Paul was not so naive as to ignore these blunt reminders of government's capacity to do evil.<sup>350</sup>

(3) Paul was demanding submission to the government only for the short interval before the kingdom would be established in power.<sup>351</sup> This view assumes the "consistent," or *konsequente*, view of early Christian eschatology and ethics made famous by A. Schweitzer. Such an interpretation does not do justice to the NT and must read into Rom. 13:1–7 an eschatological focus that is simply not there.<sup>352</sup>

(4) Paul demands submission to "authorities," interpreted as both secular rulers and the spiritual powers that stand behind them, only as long as those authorities manifest their own submission to Christ. We have already argued that this interpretation is linguistically impossible (see the notes on v. 1).

(5) Paul's teaching in this paragraph must not be overread. It should not be taken as absolute in its own right apart from the larger biblical context in which government authorities are regarded much more negatively. Paul may be directing his teaching to a

<sup>349</sup> See the introduction to 13:1–7 for bibliography.

<sup>350</sup> Rightly emphasized by Schrage, *Christen und Staat*, 52–53.

<sup>351</sup> See, e.g., Dibelius, "Rom und die Christen," 184.

<sup>352</sup> See particularly Neugebauer, "Zur Auslegung," 160–66.

particular situation in Rome. Finding in the passage a universally applicable norm for the Christian's attitude toward government is simply an overinterpretation that fails to take into account the specific local nature of the text.<sup>353</sup> There is, of course, some truth in this point; and vv. 6–7 are thought by many to suggest that Paul is especially concerned to address an immediate problem in the Roman community (see the [introduction](#) to this section). But even if this is the case (and it is not clear either way), vv. 1–2 are hard to get around. Paul here goes out of his way to emphasize the universal scope of his demand: “every soul” is to submit; there is “no authority” except by appointment of God. The text does not clearly teach the divine ordination of government in general; for Paul speaks throughout concretely of governmental authorities and not about the concept or the institution of government. But, in keeping with the OT and Jewish tradition (see the notes on v. 1), he does make clear that God stands behind every governmental authority whom the p 825 Christian encounters. Application to situations beyond those in Rome in Paul's day seems to be intended.<sup>354</sup>

(6) Paul demands submission to government only as long as the government functions as Paul says it should function in vv. 3–4. The government that rewards good and punishes evil deserves Christian obedience; but the government that begins doing the reverse forfeits its divine prerogative, and Christians are free to disobey it.<sup>355</sup> To be

<sup>353</sup> E.g., with various twists and emphases, Michel, 395–97; Wilckens, 3.40–42; Leenhardt, 328; Käsemann, 354, 359; idem, “Principles of Interpretation,” 196–216; Bammel, “Romans 13,” 366–75; Heiligenthal, “Strategien konformer Ethik,” 55–61; Hultgren, “Reflections on Romans 13:1–7,” 269; Jewett, 786–87, 794 (who focuses on Paul's need to secure support from Rome for his Spanish mission); L. Johnson, 202; Longenecker, 949–52, 971–72; T. Carter, “Irony of Romans 13,” 209–28; D. Campbell, “Paul's Apocalyptic Politics,” 129–52.

<sup>354</sup> On the divine ordination of government, see, e.g., Calvin, *Institutes* 4.20.2. On the universal applicability of the text, see, e.g., Wright, 716–20; Schlier, “Beurteilung des Staates,” 6–9. Note also Kosnetter, “Röm 13,1–7,” 347–55; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 321–24; Merklein, “Sinn und Zweck,” 238–70; and, more cautiously, K. Aland, “Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat,” 26–123.

<sup>355</sup> The view is very common; see, e.g., Hering, “‘Serviteurs de Dieu,’” 31–40; Stuart, 401; Achtemeier, 205; Leenhardt, 323–25. Porter finds a basis for this restriction in the designation of the authorities as ὑπερχούσας in v. 1. While this term is usually translated “governing,” Porter

sure, Paul does not explicitly make our submission conditional on the way a government acts: vv. 3–4 are simply descriptive. But we must ask why Paul can describe government in such an unrelieved positive light when he knew very well that many governments do not, in fact, behave in this manner. And the answer may be that Paul is describing government as it *should* be. Perhaps, then, we are justified in thinking that Paul would require Christians to submit to government when it behaves in the way God intended it to behave. Thus, when a government arrogates to itself divine powers (as in the Revelation), Christians are no longer bound to it.<sup>356</sup>

(7) Paul demands a “submission” to government: not strict and universal obedience. “Submission,” as we pointed out in the exegesis of v. 1, denotes a recognition of the place that God has given government in the ordering of the world. In this sense, as many interpreters have noted, Paul relativizes the authorities by insisting that they have only derivative power: they exist and have authority only in relationship to God.<sup>357</sup> The Christian submits to government by acknowledging this divinely ordained status of government and its consequent right to demand the believer’s allegiance. In most cases, then, Christian submission to government will involve obeying what government tells the Christian to do. But government does not have absolute rights over the believer, for government, like every human institution, is subordinate to God himself. The ultimate claim of God, who stands at the peak of the hierarchy p 826 of relationships in which the Christian is placed, is always assumed. “Submission to the governmental authorities is therefore an expression of respect not for the authorities themselves [I would say ‘in and of themselves’] but for the crucified deity who stands behind them.”<sup>358</sup> This means, then, that Christians may continue to submit to a particular government (acknowledging their subordination to it generally) even as they, in obedience to a higher authority, refuse to do, in a given instance, what that government requires. In a

<sup>356</sup> Whether a government can become so demonic that the Christian has the right not only to refuse to obey it but also actively to seek its overthrow (e.g., revolution) is a matter we cannot go into here.

<sup>357</sup> E.g., Wright, 718–19; Horrell, “Peaceable, Tolerant Community,” 87–88. Jewett (790) claims that this argument “turns the entire Roman civic cult on its head.”

<sup>358</sup> Jewett, 790.

similar way, the Christian wife, called on to submit to her husband, may well have to disobey a particular request of her husband if it conflicts with her allegiance to God.<sup>359</sup>

Balance is needed. On the one hand, we must not obscure the teaching of [Rom. 13:1–7](#) in a flood of qualifications. Paul makes clear that government is ordained by God—indeed, that every particular governmental authority is ordained by God—and that the Christian must recognize and respond to this fact with an attitude of submission. “Government is more than a nuisance to be put up with; it is an institution established by God to accomplish some of his purposes on earth (see [vv. 3–4](#)).<sup>360</sup> On the other hand, we must not read [Rom. 13:1–7](#) out of its broad NT context and put government in a position relative to the Christian that only God can hold. Christians should give thanks for government as an institution of God; we should pray regularly for our leaders ([1 Tim. 2:1–2](#)); and we should be prepared to follow the orders of our government. But we should also refuse to give to government any absolute rights and should evaluate all its demands in the light of the gospel.

## E. LOVE AND THE LAW (13:8–10)

*8 Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another. For the one who loves the other person has fulfilled the law. 9 For the series of commandments, “you shall not commit adultery,” “you shall not murder,” “you shall not steal,”<sup>a</sup> “you shall not covet”<sup>b361</sup>—and if*

<sup>359</sup> Judge makes similar comments about the “ranks” that [Gal. 3:28](#) speaks about, noting how the NT encourages Christians to recognize the continuing validity of the sociopolitical order (“Cultural Conformity,” 9).

<sup>360</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1.381.

<sup>a</sup> [Deut. 5:17–19](#); see [Exod. 20:13–15](#)

<sup>b</sup> [Deut. 5:21](#); [Exod. 20:17](#)

<sup>361</sup> The unusual order and selection of commandments in [v. 9](#) has created some confusion in the text. Several Fathers (Marcion, Clement, Origen) omit the commandment “you shall not covet”; an important early uncial of the Alexandrian family ([Ⲛ](#)), a later Alexandrian witness (81), as well as other MSS, lectionaries, and early versions, insert the commandment “you shall not testify falsely” (οὐ ψευδομαρτυρήσεις) between “you shall not steal” and “you shall not covet”; one lectionary and several Fathers substitute “you shall not testify falsely” for “you shall not covet”;

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there is any other commandment—is summed up in this commandment: p 827 “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>c</sup> <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to the neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul cleverly uses the idea of “obligation” to make the transition from his advice about governing authorities (vv. 1–7) to his exhortation to love the neighbor (vv. 8–10). In v. 7 Paul urges, “pay back what you owe to everyone.” Paul then repeats this exhortation in v. 8a, but adds to it a significant exception: the obligation of love for one another. In this demand for love, Paul suggests, we find an obligation that can never be discharged, a “never-ending debt” (Bengel). We will never be in a position to claim that we have “loved enough.” Yet, while joined to vv. 1–7 by means of the notion of obligation, vv. 8–10 are connected by their content to 12:9–21, where Paul expounded the meaning and outworking of “sincere love.”<sup>362</sup> These verses therefore return to the main line of Paul’s exhortation after the somewhat parenthetical advice about government in 13:1–7. But these verses look forward as well as backward. In their insistence that love for others fulfills the law, Paul lays groundwork for his rebuke of the strong and the weak (14:1–15:13), who are allowing debates about the law to disturb the love and unity that they should be exhibiting.<sup>363</sup>

The obligation of love for another (v. 8b) is the key point in the paragraph. Paul highlights the importance of love in vv. 8c–10 by presenting it as the “fulfillment” of the law.<sup>364</sup> This point also serves the larger purpose of the letter—the explanation and

and Chrysostom omits “you shall not covet” altogether. All these variants (none of them strongly attested) are due to assimilation to the OT text.

<sup>c</sup> Lev. 19:18

<sup>362</sup> Attempts to find a connection between vv. 1–7 and 8–10 in content (e.g., that vv. 8–10 highlight love as an important motivation for our obedience to governing authorities [Calvin, 484] or that vv. 8–10 bring another perspective on justice [Godet, 446]) are strained.

<sup>363</sup> See esp. 14:15—“If your brother or sister is distressed by what you eat, you are no longer acting in love”—and the reference to the “neighbor” in 15:2. See Räsänen, *Paul and the Law*, 64; Fitzmyer, 677.

<sup>364</sup> The connection between “love” and “law” is characteristic of the paragraph, as Paul relates them together in a roughly chiasmic pattern: love (v. 8b)—love (v. 8c)—law (v. 8d)—law



defense of the gospel—by guarding Paul’s gospel at a potential point of vulnerability. For the claim that Christians are “not under the law” (6:14, 15) could open the way to the assumption that Paul’s gospel leads to a “do whatever you want” libertinism. Paul rejects any such conclusion p 828 by asserting that obedience of the central demand of the gospel, love for the neighbor, provides for the law’s complete fulfillment.<sup>365</sup>

In a manner typical of the exhortations throughout Rom. 12–13, Paul fashions these verses from traditional material. The emphasis on love for the neighbor as a central obligation of the law may have its roots in the Hellenistic synagogue.<sup>366</sup> But far more important for Paul is the fact that Jesus himself singled out the love command (Lev. 19:18) as one of the two commandments on which “all the law and the prophets hang” (Matt. 22:34–40//Mark 12:28–34//Luke 10:25–28; see also John 13:34–35). Paul, then, undoubtedly depends on Jesus’ teaching in these verses.<sup>367</sup> The traditional character of the connection between love and the law is seen also in the parallel to this text in Gal. 5:13–15. Following a pattern typical of Rom. 12–13, then, Paul here reiterates in his general exhortation of the Roman Christians a point he has made before.

8 The need for Christians to discharge their obligations forms the transition between vv. 1–7 and vv. 8–10. In v. 7a, Paul urged Christians to “pay back” their “debts” (*opheilas*) to everyone, especially (in that context) to the governing authorities. In v. 8a, Paul repeats this demand: “Owe [*opheilete*] nothing to anyone.”<sup>368</sup> This command does not

(“commandments”; v. 9a)—love (v. 9b)—love (v. 10a)—law (v. 10b); see Bencze, “Analysis of ‘Romans 13.8–10,’” 90–92.

<sup>365</sup> Stuhlmacher (210–11) especially emphasizes the polemical application of vv. 8–10.

<sup>366</sup> See the detailed treatment of this background in Berger, *Gesetzesauslegung*, esp. 50–51, 99–136; see also Käsemann, 361; Schmithals, 472–73.

<sup>367</sup> See, e.g., Dunn, “Paul’s Knowledge,” 202; M. B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 121–40. Allison (“Pauline Epistles,” 16–17), noting that Jesus’ teachings about Caesar (e.g., Mark 12:13–17) and about the love command (e.g., Mark 12:28–34) come close together in the Synoptic tradition, suggests that Paul might be using a tradition in which these topics were joined.

<sup>368</sup> The verb ὀφείλω that Paul uses here often refers to financial obligations but was at an early time extended to include moral and religious obligations as well (F. Hauck, *TDNT* 5.559–61). It can therefore mean both “owe” (in which case it is usually followed by an accusative denoting

forbid a Christian from ever incurring a debt (e.g., to buy a house or a car); it rather demands that Christians repay any debts they do incur promptly and in accordance with the terms of the contract. Prompt payment of debts, however, is simply a transitional point in these verses. Paul's real interest emerges in the next clause: that Christians "love one another."<sup>369</sup> What is the relationship between this demand for love and the [p 829](#) preceding demand that Christians "owe nothing to anyone"? The words that connect these two commands<sup>370</sup> could be adversative; we would then translate v. 8a, "Owe nothing to anyone; *but* you ought to love one another."<sup>371</sup> However, the words can also denote an exception; and, from early times, commentators have generally preferred this explanation, translating, as in the NRSV, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." I also prefer this interpretation, since it gives the debated words the meaning they usually have in Paul and creates a transition between the two

what is owed) and "be obliged to" (in which case it is usually followed by an infinitive stating the obligation). Paul generally uses the word in the latter sense (Rom. 15:1, 27; 1 Cor. 4:8; 5:10; 7:36; 9:10; 11:7, 10; 2 Cor. 11:1; 12:11; 12:14; Gal. 5:12; Eph. 5:28; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13—in each of these verses [with the exception of 1 Cor. 4:8, 2 Cor. 11:1, and Gal. 5:12, which use a fixed form of the verb] ὀφείλω is followed by an infinitive). Only here and in Phlm. 18 does he use it in the sense "owe," with that which is owed stated in the accusative.

<sup>369</sup> The article (τό) before the clause ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν may be anaphoric, Paul "referring back" to the well-known command of Jesus (Godet; Longenecker; BDF §399[1]). On the other hand, the article could be used simply to make the following phrase into a substantive (as τό at the beginning of v. 9 does); see A. Robertson, *Grammar*, 243; BDF (§267) indicate that the article is often used in Greek to introduce quotations.

<sup>370</sup> εἰ μή.

<sup>371</sup> On this interpretation, as the translation above indicates, the meaning of the verb ὀφείλω shifts from "owe" in v. 8a to "ought," "be obliged," in v. 8b (where, although it does not occur, it must be supplied from the previous clause). This shift in meaning could, as our preceding note indicates, find some basis in the syntax, since we have an infinitive (ἀγαπᾶν) in v. 8b. See, e.g., F. Hauck, *TDNT* 5:564; Michel; Murray; Ortkemper, *Leben aus dem Glauben*, 126–27. Black notes that the double meaning of ὀφείλω matches its Aramaic equivalent and that the radicals of that verb are the same as the verb "to love."

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commands that is both natural and striking.<sup>372</sup> As [Origen](#) put it, “Let your only debt that is unpaid be that of love—a debt which you should always be attempting to discharge in full, but will never succeed in discharging.”<sup>373</sup>

Pauline use of “one another”<sup>374</sup> in similar contexts shows that the command to love is restricted to love for fellow Christians.<sup>375</sup> Nevertheless, the universalistic language that both precedes—“no one”—and follows—“the other”—this command demands that the love Paul is exhorting Christians to display is ultimately not to be restricted to fellow Christians.<sup>376</sup> We are called to love “the other”; and, as [Jesus’](#) parable of the Good Samaritan so vividly illustrates, this “other” may be someone quite unknown to us or even hostile toward us ([Luke](#) p 830 10:25–37). As Paul has already made clear, “sincere love” (12:9) means that we are to “bless our persecutors” (12:14) and seek to do good to *all* people (12:17).

In the second part of the verse, Paul explains<sup>377</sup> why love for one another is the Christian’s one outstanding debt: “the one who loves the other person has fulfilled the

<sup>372</sup> The combination εἰ μὴ occurs 26 times in Paul, and 23 mean “except” ([Rom.](#) 7:7 (twice); 9:29; 11:15; 13:1; 1 [Cor.](#) 1:14; 2:2, 11 (twice); 7:17; 8:4; 10:13; 12:3; 14:5; 15:2; 2 [Cor.](#) 2:2; 12:5, 13; [Gal.](#) 1:19; 6:14; [Eph.](#) 4:9; [Phil.](#) 4:15; 1 [Tim.](#) 5:19); only in [Rom.](#) 14:14, 1 [Cor.](#) 7:17, and [Gal.](#) 1:7 does the combination probably mean “but.” Furthermore, as [Cranfield](#) notes, the alternative interpretation demands not only that ὀφείλω have a different meaning in v. 8b than it does in v. 8a, but that it also have a different mood (imperative in v. 8a; indicative in v. 8b). See also [S-H](#); [Dunn](#); [Lyonnet](#), “Charité plénitude,” 152–53.

<sup>373</sup> [S-H](#).

<sup>374</sup> ἀλλήλους.

<sup>375</sup> As the reciprocal nature of the word suggests, ἀλλήλους (and ἀλλήλοις), when preceded by a command, always in Paul denotes fellow Christians. See esp. 1 [Thess.](#) 3:12 and 5:15, which explicitly command actions toward both “one another” (fellow Christians) and “all” (non-Christians). See, e.g., [Dunn](#); [Kruse](#); contra, e.g., [Cranfield](#); [Wilckens](#).

<sup>376</sup> For a similar view, see [Murray](#); [Dunn](#); [Schreiner](#); [Bertschmann](#), *Bowing before Christ*, 164–68. Contra [Jewett](#), who suggests that the love Paul calls for was to be displayed especially in the believers’ love feasts.

<sup>377</sup> See the γάρ, “for.”

law.”<sup>378</sup> By using the phrase “the other” to specify the object of our love,<sup>379</sup> Paul emphasizes that we are called to love specific individuals with whom we come into contact. At the same time, he hints that these individuals may be people who are different from us.<sup>380</sup> As the repetition of the point in v. 10 makes clear, Paul’s claim that the one who loves the other “has fulfilled” the (Mosaic<sup>381</sup>) law introduces a central point in this paragraph.<sup>382</sup>

Two interpretations of this claim are possible. On the one hand, Paul may simply be highlighting the centrality of love *within* the law. On this view, Paul is teaching that loving other people is necessary if we are to claim truly to have “done” what the law demands. Paul’s purpose is not to minimize the importance and continuing relevance of

<sup>378</sup> Cranfield suggests that this clause may explain why the debt of love must always remain outstanding: because to be done with love would mean the fulfillment of the law, a task impossible for human beings. But this explanation is both oversubtle and overlooks that Paul does, indeed, claim that Christians fulfill the law (see 8:4).

<sup>379</sup> An alternative translation, which takes τὸν ἕτερον as a modifier of νόμον, is “the one who loves has fulfilled the other law,” the “other law” being the Mosaic law (as opposed to the Roman law or to the commandment of love) or the other love command (of God) (see Zahn; Byrne [apparently]; W. Gutbrod, *TDNT* 4.1071; Leenhardt; Marxsen, “ἕτερος νόμος Röm. 13,8,” 230–37; Merk, *Handeln aus Glauben*, 165). However, while ἕτερος can occur in attributive position (between the article and its substantive; see A. Robertson, *Grammar*, 748), it usually does not. More seriously, this rendering would leave the verb ἀγαπάω without an object—an unprecedented situation in Paul.

<sup>380</sup> The article specifies—we are to love that particular “other” person with whom we come into contact (see Michel; Cranfield; Dunn)—while ἕτερος suggests distinction or difference (Barrett; for parallels to this use of ἕτερος, see 2:1, 21; 1 Cor. 4:6; 6:1; 10:24, 29; 14:17; Phil. 2:4).

<sup>381</sup> Paul is speaking here again about the Mosaic law, the Torah, as is clear both from the larger context of Romans (where the Mosaic law is constantly at issue) and the immediate context (the list of commandments in v. 9); contra those (e.g., Jewett) who overemphasize the lack of an article and think Paul is discussing “law” in general.

<sup>382</sup> The assertion in v. 9 that the love command “sums up” the law makes a different though related point, as we will see.

the other commandments but to insist that love must be the guiding principle in our obedience to these other commandments.<sup>383</sup> p 831 However, it is not clear that this view does justice to the word “has fulfilled.” Paul reserves the word “fulfill” for Christian experience; only Christians, as a result of the work of Christ and through the Spirit, can “fulfill” the law.<sup>384</sup> A more likely interpretation, then, is that Paul refers here to a complete and final accomplishment of the law’s demands that is possible only in the new age of eschatological accomplishment.<sup>385</sup> Christians who love others have satisfied the demands of the law *en toto*;<sup>386</sup> and they need therefore not worry about any other commandment.<sup>387</sup>

Paul reveals here again his concern to maintain a careful balance in his teaching

<sup>383</sup> See, particularly clearly, Murray, representing at this point the mainstream Reformed tradition. See also Ortkemper, *Leben aus dem Glauben*, 128–29; Dunn; Schreiner; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 280–81. Many suggest that Paul stresses the centrality of love within the law, but with the continuing relevance of the law understood in terms of its basic principles rather than its commands (e.g., Byrne).

<sup>384</sup> See the notes on 8:4. Danker thinks that word has a commercial flavor here (“Under Contract,” 96, 111). The context could support such a nuance (see vv. 6–8a), but Paul’s theological application of the term elsewhere does not betray such an idea.

<sup>385</sup> See, e.g., Whittle, *Covenant Renewal*, 110–33. The perfect tense of the verb *πεπλήρωκεν* may also suggest this point. Some scholars think this is a “gnomic” perfect—e.g., “the one who loves the other is fulfilling the law” (A. Robertson, *Grammar*, 897; Michel; Käsemann)—while others think it preserves its allegedly natural significance of a process resulting from an action—e.g., “the one who loves has just then entered into the state of having fulfilled the law” (S-H). But the perfect tense probably simply denotes a state: “the one who loves is in the state of fulfilling the law.”

<sup>386</sup> As Wolter puts it, “the observance of the love commandment leads to the same outcome as the observance of the commandments that he quotes” (*Paul*, 328). See also, e.g., Longenecker; Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 434–37. Obviously, loving others does not fulfill those parts of the law that state our obligations to God. But Paul is thinking, in this context, only of the law as it dictates our conduct toward other human beings.

<sup>387</sup> See Fitzmyer.

about the law in Romans. On the one hand, believers are no longer “under the law” (6:14, 15); they have “been put to death to it” (7:4). On the other hand, Paul teaches that faith “establishes the law” (3:31) and that believers filled with the Spirit find that “the just decree of the law has been fulfilled” (8:4). This passage helps put these perspectives together: the commandments of the old covenant do not provide direct guidance for new covenant believers. But this does not mean that the law was a bad thing; nor does it mean even that the law has no more relevance. It has been “fulfilled”: brought to its intended eschatological climax by Jesus and his apostles. Their teaching—“the law of Christ” (see Gal. 6:2)—is now the source of ethical guidance. Central to that new covenant law is love for the other. When, therefore, believers love others as they should, they “fulfill the law”: they bring to expression in actual life circumstances what the law was all along aiming at.<sup>388</sup> We must emphasize, however, that such complete and consistent loving of others remains an impossibility, even for the Spirit-filled believer: we will never, short of glory, truly love “the other” as we should. This means that it p 832 would be premature to claim that love “replaces” the law for the Christian, as if the only commandment we ever needed to worry about was the command of love. For as long as our love remains incomplete, we may very well require other commandments both to chastise and to guide us.<sup>389</sup> What the source of those commandments may be is, of course, another question; and this Paul touches on in the next verse.

9 Paul now supports his contention that loving others fulfills the law by arguing that the commandments of the law are “summed up” in the “word”<sup>390</sup> found in Lev. 19:18: “love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>391</sup> Paul cites as illustrations of the commandments he

<sup>388</sup> For greater development of these ideas, see D. Moo, “Law of Moses”; idem, “Law of Christ.”

<sup>389</sup> “The law protects love from the subjectivism and self-deception to which the Christian is constantly exposed, not because he is ‘unjust,’ but because he is human” (Deidun, *New Covenant Morality*, 224).

<sup>390</sup> The use of the word λόγος for a commandment has precedents in Judaism, esp. in relation to the Ten Commandments, often called the “Ten Words” or “Decalogue” (see Exod. 24:2–8; Deut. 10:4; Philo, *Who Is the Heir?* 168; *Decalogue* 32; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.138).

<sup>391</sup> Paul’s quotation follows the majority LXX text exactly, which in turn adequately renders the

has in mind abbreviated references to four commandments from the Decalogue.<sup>392</sup> His addition “and if there is any other<sup>393</sup> commandment” makes clear, however, that he includes other commandments: probably, as the context would suggest, all those commandments of the law that relate to our relations with other human beings.<sup>394</sup> Various Jewish authors refer to the commandment to love the neighbor in [Lev. 19:18](#), but it was given no special prominence in Judaism generally. Probably, therefore, the central position that Paul gives the commandment echoes [Jesus](#), who paired [Lev. 19:18](#) with [Deut. 6:5](#) as the commandments on which “all the law and the prophets hang” ([Matt. 22:34–40](#)).<sup>395</sup> Paul undoubtedly also follows [Jesus](#) (see the parable of the Good Samaritan, [Luke 10:25–37](#)) in interpreting the “neighbor” in the commandment to refer to other persons generally and not (as the original text [p 833](#) of [Lev. 19:18](#) might indicate) to the fellow Jew.<sup>396</sup> The “as yourself” in the commandment does not

Hebrew.

<sup>392</sup> This order is the same as that found in [MS B](#) of the [LXX](#) in [Deut. 5:17–18](#); in the Nash Papyrus (a first- or second-century [B.C.](#) scrap of text with the Ten Commandments); it is reflected in several other Jewish and early Christian sources ([Luke 18:20](#); [Jas. 2:11](#); [Philo, Decalogue 24; 36; 51; 121–37; 167–71; Special Laws 3.28; Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis 6.16](#)). It may be an order popular in Diaspora Judaism (Dunn); Koch ([Schrift, 34](#)) thinks that [B](#) may be the original [LXX](#) text here.

<sup>393</sup> This is probably one of the many places in which [ἕτερος](#) has lost its original “dual” emphasis (N. Turner, [Syntax, 197](#)).

<sup>394</sup> Kruse, however, thinks Paul has in view only other commandments from the Decalogue; or possibly only the “second table” of the Decalogue. Stuhlmacher argues that early Jewish sources (e.g., [Philo, Decalogue 18–19; Josephus, Ant. 3.89, 93; m. Tamid 5:1](#)) demonstrate the centrality of the Decalogue in the [NT](#) period; only with the Christian “appropriation” of the Decalogue did later Jews downplay its significance.

<sup>395</sup> Dunn.

<sup>396</sup> Some Jews understood [לְרֵעִי](#) in the narrower sense, “fellow Israelite” (see the targum and Sipre on [Lev. 19:18](#)), while others applied it more broadly (see [Lev. 19:34; T. Zeb. 5:1; T. Asher 5:7; T. Naph. 5:2](#)). See Berger, [Gesetzesauslegung](#), 99–136; Nissen, [Gott und der Nächste](#), 304–8. The interchange between a lawyer and Jesus in [Luke 10:25–29](#) implies that many teachers of the law in

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command or give an excuse for egotism or selfishness. It simply recognizes that people do, as a matter of fact, love themselves. It is this deep concern for ourselves that should characterize our attitude toward others.

Paul denotes the relationship of the love command of [Lev. 19:18](#) to the rest of the commandments with the verb “sum up.”<sup>397</sup> The imprecision of this term is reflected in the contradictory theological conclusions that are drawn from Paul’s assertion. Thus, H. Räisänen claims that Paul teaches here the “radical reduction” of the law to the love command,<sup>398</sup> while T. Schreiner concludes that the verse shows that some OT commandments are still applicable to believers.<sup>399</sup> At issue, then, is whether, in “summing up” the OT commandments about our relations to others, the love command *replaces* these commandments or whether it simply *focuses* them by setting forth a demand that is integral to each one of them. When we remember that Paul has earlier in Romans proclaimed the Christian’s freedom from the “binding authority” of the Mosaic law ([6:14](#), [15](#); [7:4](#); [8:4](#)), the former alternative seems to be closer to the truth. The Christian, who belongs to the [New Covenant](#) people of God, is no longer “under the [Mosaic] law,” the law for the Old Covenant people of God; he is under a “new law,” “the law of Christ” (see [Gal. 6:2](#) and [1 Cor. 9:19–21](#)).<sup>400</sup> And central to this new law is a

Jesus’ day held to a “narrow” meaning of the term.

<sup>397</sup> The verb is ἀνακεφαλαιόω. The term occurs in the NT only elsewhere in [Eph. 1:10](#), where Paul describes the plan of God for the fullness of times as consisting in the “summing up” in Christ of all things; it does not occur in the LXX. The word was frequent in literary Greek, where it often refers to the summation or conclusion of a book or speech (H. Schlier, *TDNT* 3.681–82).

<sup>398</sup> Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 27; similar, though not so extreme in all details, are Lindemann, “Biblichen Toragebote,” 262–63; Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 433–34; Deidun, *New Covenant Morality*, 153.

<sup>399</sup> Schreiner, *Law and Its Fulfillment*, 149–50; see also Thielman, *From Plight to Solution*, 89–90; B. Martin, *Christ and the Law*, 151; Schrage, *Konkreten Einzelgebote*, 255–56.

<sup>400</sup> It is important to stress that here, as throughout Romans, Paul is speaking of a very definite law: the law of Moses, the Torah. He is not therefore claiming that love renders irrelevant all other commandments; only that love for others has, for the New Covenant people of God, taken center stage away from the Mosaic law. As [Gal. 6:2](#), [1 Cor. 9:19–21](#), and the many commands in Paul’s

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command that Christ himself took from the Mosaic law and made central to his new demand: the command to love our neighbors as ourselves (see Gal. 6:2 with 5:13–14).

p 834 **10** While not explicitly connected with v. 9, the first statement in v. 10 clearly explains what Paul has asserted in that verse. The reason why the love command can “sum up” the law is that “love does no wrong to the neighbor.” For not doing wrong to others or, positively, doing good to others, is exactly what the OT commandments about our relationship with other human beings aims at. “Therefore” (Gk. *oun*), Paul concludes, “love is the fulfillment of the law.” Opinions on the meaning of this assertion depend considerably on the decisions one reaches about the similar statements in vv. 8 and 9. Murray, for instance, argues that Paul is here presenting love as the virtue that brings our obedience of the law to its “full measure” (*plērōma*). But the proximity of the cognate verb *plēroō* (“fulfill”) in v. 8b—which matches v. 10b in a chiasmatic arrangement—suggests that *plērōma* here has the active meaning “fulfilling.”<sup>401</sup> It is also likely that v. 10b repeats the idea of v. 8b: that the Christian who loves, and who therefore does what the law requires (vv. 9–10a), has brought the law to its culmination, its eschatological fulfillment.<sup>402</sup>

## F. LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE DAY (13:11–14)

11 *And do this, knowing the time: that it is already the hour for you*<sup>403</sup> *to rise up from sleep.*

letters themselves indicate, Paul by no means thinks that the love command is the only commandment of relevance to Christian believers.

<sup>401</sup> See, e.g., Käsemann; Wilckens; Cranfield; G. Delling, *TDNT* 6.305. See the notes on 11:12 for the meaning and usage of πλήρωμα.

<sup>402</sup> Lagrange; Ziesler; Feuillet, “Loi de Dieu,” 55; Deidun, *New Covenant Morality*, 153.

<sup>403</sup> Several early and important witnesses (P<sup>46</sup> [probably], the secondary Alexandrian MSS 33 and 1739, the western uncial D, Ψ, and the majority text) read ἡμᾶς (“us”) in place of ὑμᾶς (“you”); the latter is found in the two most important Alexandrian uncials (Ⲛ [original hand] and B), three other Alexandrian MSS (A, C, and 81), P, and many minuscules and Fathers—two early versions and Origen have no corresponding word at all. The variation, involving only one letter in the Greek text and often hardly affecting the sense, is very common in the NT MS tradition. The ἡμῶν (“our”) later in the verse might suggest that Paul would have used the first person plural here also;

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*For our salvation is now nearer than when we believed. 12 The night is far along; the day is drawing near. Therefore put off<sup>404</sup> the works of darkness; p 835 put on the weapons of light. 13 Walk decently, as in the day, not in carousings and drinking bouts, not in sexual excesses and licentiousness; not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to carry out its desires.*

Paul brings to a close his general exhortations to the Roman Christians by focusing on the same point with which he began: a call for a totally new way of living in light of the eschatological situation. In 12:1–2, Paul urges Christians to give themselves as living sacrifices, adopting a lifestyle in keeping with the new era to which they belong. In 13:11–14, he exhorts Christians to clothe themselves with Christ himself (v. 14) and with that behavior (v. 12b) fitting for those who live already in the light of the great “day” of final salvation that is soon to dawn (vv. 11–12a).<sup>405</sup> The earlier text encourages Christians to look at the present in light of the past: by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, the “old age” has been transcended by a new one. The Christian is to live out the values of that new age, appropriating the power available in the gospel to renew the mind and transform conduct. The text now before us shifts the perspective, encouraging Christians to look at the present in light of the future. For, while transferred by God’s grace into the new realm of righteousness and life, Christians still

but perhaps it is more likely that a scribe would have changed an original ὑμᾶς to ἡμᾶς to achieve uniformity (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 467; Godet, 449; Cranfield, 2.680).

<sup>404</sup> In place of ἀποθώμεθα, “let us put off”—read in the major Alexandrian uncials (Ⲙ, Β), other Alexandrian MSS (A, C, 33, 81, and 1739), Ψ, the western uncial D (second corrector), and the majority text—P<sup>46</sup>, along with the western tradition (original hand and third corrector of D, F, and G), reads ἀποβλώμεθα, “let us throw off.” Zuntz (*Text of the Epistles*, 94), Cranfield (2.685), and Wilckens (3.76) defend this alternative, impressed with the combination of the western tradition and P<sup>46</sup>, and arguing that an early scribe substituted for it the more familiar ἀποθώμεθα. But it is not at all uncommon for P<sup>46</sup> to line up with the western tradition, and Paul never uses this verb anywhere else (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 467).

<sup>405</sup> The way in which the eschatological focus of 12:1–2 and 13:11–14 functions as a kind of inclusio for chaps. 12–13 is widely recognized; see the notes on 12:1–2; and esp. here, Michel, 412; Wilckens, 3.78; M. B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 151.

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await full and final salvation (5:9–10), “the redemption of the body” (8:23). The transformation that the gospel both demands and empowers flows from the work of Christ already accomplished. But it also looks ahead to the completion of the process on that day when we will be fully “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (8:29).<sup>406</sup> Christians are not only to “become what we are”; we are also to “become what we one day will be.”

Verses 11–14 fall naturally into two parts: the “indicative” section, in which Paul reminds us of the nature of the “time” (vv. 11–12a); and the “imperative” section, in which he summons us to action in light of the “time” (vv. 12b–14). The imperatives occur in three pairs of contrasts:

“put off ... /put on ...” (v. 12b);

“walk decently ... /not in ...” (v. 13);

“put on the Lord Jesus Christ /make no provision for the flesh” (v. 14).

Appealing to the imminence of Christ’s return as a basis for exhortation is a common NT pattern, rooted in Jesus’ own teaching.<sup>407</sup> And the specific parallels p 836 in wording between this paragraph and other Pauline texts (esp. 1 Thess. 5:1–10) confirm the traditional nature of what Paul is here telling the Roman Christians.<sup>408</sup>

<sup>406</sup> See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 267–68.

<sup>407</sup> See esp. 1 Pet. 4:7; Jas. 5:8–9. On the influence of Jesus’ eschatological discourse (Mark 13 and pars.) on Paul’s teaching, see esp. D. Wenham, “Paul and the Synoptic Apocalypse,” 345–75. Contact (perhaps indirect) between this paragraph and Jesus’ teaching is also posited by M. B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 141–49. He notes that calls to stay “awake” and avoid sleep in eschatological contexts are not found in Judaism; but they are in the teaching of Jesus (see, e.g., Mark 13:33–37).

<sup>408</sup> Both Rom. 13:11–14 and 1 Thess. 5:1–10 use the day/night and light/darkness metaphors together with both eschatological and moral reference; and both speak of salvation as future and call for the “putting on” (of virtues and Christ in Romans; of spiritual “armor” in Thessalonians). The need to “wake from sleep” (ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθηῖναι—v. 11) also resembles the puzzling “saying” of Eph. 5:14: “wake up [ἐγείρε], sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Many think this saying could stem from early Christian baptismal liturgy and suggest accordingly that

**11–12a** The phrase that introduces this next paragraph, “and this,”<sup>409</sup> might be an idiom used to create a transition—“besides this” (NRSV)<sup>410</sup>—but it is probably elliptical, with an imperative such as “do”<sup>411</sup> to be supplied—see NIV: “And do this, understanding....”<sup>412</sup> Many commentators add an ascensive nuance to the phrase—“and do this *especially* as you recognize ...”<sup>413</sup>—but there seems no good grammatical basis for it. The “this” could refer back immediately to the love command in vv. 8–10,<sup>414</sup> but it probably alludes to all the exhortations in 12:1–13:10.<sup>415</sup> All that Paul has set forth as the will of God for our sacrificial service in the new age of redemption is to be done because we understand<sup>416</sup> the “time,” or “opportune moment,”<sup>417</sup> in which we live.

p 837 Paul then adds three statements in which he explains<sup>418</sup> just what he means by the “time.” His first and third assertions share the metaphor of night giving way to day: “it is already<sup>419</sup> the hour for you to rise up from sleep”<sup>420</sup> (v. 11b) and “the night is far

Rom. 13:11–14 also reproduces, at least in part, this liturgy (e.g., Wilckens, 3.75; Jewett, 817–18 [who, however, thinks the primary context for the hymn was the “love feast”]).

<sup>409</sup> καὶ τοῦτο.

<sup>410</sup> See also ESV; CSB; Murray; Cranfield; Dunn. Appeal is made to 1 Cor. 6:6, 8; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:28, but none of these is parallel to Rom. 13:11.

<sup>411</sup> ποιεῖτε.

<sup>412</sup> See also NASB; NET; NAB; Moulton, *Prolegomena*, 182; Michel; Wilckens. Godet adds an indicative verb: “and this you fulfill, recognizing....”

<sup>413</sup> The view is as early as Theodoret, who paraphrased with μάλιστα, “especially”; see also Vögtle, “Paraklese und Eschatologie,” 179–80; Michel; Wilckens; Schlatter. Longenecker stresses the close relationship between vv. 8–10 and 11–14, viewing them together as one section in the letter.

<sup>414</sup> Murray; Fitzmyer.

<sup>415</sup> Godet; Barrett; Cranfield; Baumgarten, *Paulus und die Apokalyptik*, 209.

<sup>416</sup> The participle εἰδότες has causal force.

<sup>417</sup> καιρός. While καιρός cannot always be neatly distinguished from χρόνος, the former does often connote “opportunity” and is generally used in eschatological contexts (see Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 127).

<sup>418</sup> See ὅτι.

<sup>419</sup> It makes better sense to take ἤδη, “already,” with ὥρα (Cranfield) than with ἐγερθῆναι (as does,

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along<sup>421</sup>; the day is drawing near” (v. 12a). In a society governed by the sun rather than by the convenience of artificial lighting, people rose at dawn. Only slackards would keep to their beds after the first glow of daylight. Early rising was especially necessary in the Near East, where the bulk of work needed to be done before the heat of midday. Paul wants no slackards among his readers. Christians are to be alert and eager to “present their bodies as a living sacrifice.” But Paul does not use the darkness/light, night/day imagery simply as an illustration drawn from daily life. For in using these contrasts, Paul is drawing on a broad tradition in which these contrasts were used as metaphors for moral and eschatological conditions. Basic to Paul’s application is the OT/Jewish “the day of the Lord,” adapted by the early Christians to denote the time of Christ’s return in glory and the believer’s final redemption.<sup>422</sup> “The day” of v. 12a is e.g., S-H).

<sup>420</sup> This is the only verse in the NT that uses ὑπνος in a metaphorical sense; the verb καθεύδω, on the other hand, is used to denote “spiritual laziness and indifference” (1 Thess. 5:6; Eph. 5:14; see Mark 13:35–36; Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39). No noun form of this verb occurs in the NT, however; so Paul undoubtedly uses ὑπνος as a noun form equivalent to καθεύδω in this metaphorical sense. Sleep as a metaphor for spiritual insensitivity is widespread in the ancient world (see, e.g., Philo, *Migration of Abraham* 222; *On Dreams* 1.117; 2.106, 133, 160, etc.), but was particularly popular with the gnostics. But while the gnostics applied the concept within a cosmological and anthropological dualism (people needed to become illuminated and awake from the spiritual ignorance of this world), Paul is oriented historically and eschatologically (see esp. Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness*, 25–27).

<sup>421</sup> The verb προκόπτω usually means “progress” in the NT (in Paul: Gal. 1:14; 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:9, 16); here it has a temporal nuance: “be advanced,” “be far along” (BDAG; see Josephus, *J.W.* 4.298, “as the night advanced”). Paul probably uses the aorist because he wants simply to state the “advancement” of the time of the night.

<sup>422</sup> Paul uses several variations of this common early Christian reference: “the day of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8), “the day of our Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 1:14), “the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10; 2:16), “the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2), “the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30), “the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5), “the day when God judges” (Rom. 2:16), “the evil day” (Eph. 6:13), “that day” (2 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8), “the

certainly a reference to this “day of the Lord/Jesus Christ.”<sup>423</sup> The “night,” then, probably also hints at, by contrast, “the present evil age” p 838 (Gal. 1:4).<sup>424</sup> While not as certain, it is also possible that “the hour” in v. 11b has eschatological connotations.<sup>425</sup> To “rise from sleep,” then, means to reject “absorption in the present night-age,” to avoid conformity with the present evil age (see 12:2).<sup>426</sup>

The central explanatory statement of “the time” is a straightforward assertion of what these metaphors hint at: “our<sup>427</sup> salvation is now nearer than when we day” (Rom. 13:12, 13; 1 Thess. 5:4). These phrases all go back to the OT “day of the LORD,” the time of eschatological judgment and salvation (see, e.g., Isa. 27; Jer. 30:8–9; Joel 2:32; 3:18; Obad. 15–17).

<sup>423</sup> Although some patristic commentators thought that the “day” referred to Christ (see Schelkle, “Biblische und patristische Eschatologie,” 364–65).

<sup>424</sup> Lövestam has shown how widespread in early Judaism was the use of the contrasts night/day and darkness/light to describe the contrast between “this age” and “the age to come” (*Spiritual Wakefulness*, 10–24). See, e.g., 1 En. 58:6:

The righteous ones shall be in the light of the sun and the elect ones in the light of eternal life which has no end (v. 2)... The sun has shined upon the earth and the darkness is over. There shall be a light that has no end.... For already darkness has been destroyed, light shall be permanent before the Lord of the Spirits, and the light of uprightness shall stand firm forever and ever before the Lord of the Spirits.

The Qumran covenanters constantly use the contrast “children of light”/“children of darkness” (see esp. 1QM).

<sup>425</sup> The word ὥρα often occurs in phrases simply denoting a short period of time; this is the case in all the other occurrences of the word in Paul (1 Cor. 4:11; 15:30; 2 Cor. 7:8; Gal. 2:5; 1 Thess. 2:17; Phlm. 15), and it gives good reason to think that Paul may use the word here in this simple, prosaic sense (Cranfield). But ὥρα does have eschatological nuances in the NT (John 4:23; 5:25; 12:23; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 3:3, 10) and in the OT (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35, 40), and the context may favor such a nuance here (Dunn).

<sup>426</sup> See Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness*, 34–35.

<sup>427</sup> The pronoun ἡμῶν could go with ἐγγύτερον—“salvation is now nearer to us than when we

believed.”<sup>428</sup> Some Christians might find it puzzling that Paul places “salvation” in the future for believers. But, in fact, Paul regularly uses “salvation” and its cognates to denote the believer’s final deliverance from sin and death. Some commentators argue that salvation here refers to each individual believer’s entrance into heaven at death or at the time of the parousia.<sup>429</sup> But Paul’s imagery in this passage is not individual but salvation-historical. The “salvation” must be the completion of God’s work on behalf of the church at the time of Christ’s return.<sup>430</sup>

p 839 Many scholars think that Paul’s statement here, along with many similar ones in the NT, shows that the early Christians were certain that Christ was going to return within a very short period of time. And, since Paul’s imperatives are, to some extent, based on this premise, the failure of Christ to return as soon as Paul expected requires that we critically evaluate the continuing validity of those imperatives.<sup>431</sup> Paul certainly betrays a strong sense of expectation about the return of Christ (e.g., Phil. 4:5) and can even speak at times as if he will be alive at that time (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:15). But nowhere does he predict a near return; and, more importantly, he does not ground his exhortations on the conviction that the parousia would take place very soon but on the conviction that the parousia was always imminent—its coming certain, its timing incalculable. “On the *certainty of the event*, our faith is grounded: by the *uncertainty of the*

believed” (NRSV; ESV; NASB; Wilckens; Cranfield)—but it probably goes with ἡ σωτηρία—“our salvation is now nearer than when we believed” (KJV; NIV; NLT; NET; CSB; CEB; Michel; Dunn); for when ἔγγυς occurs in eschatological statements in the NT, it is never followed by a genitive object.

<sup>428</sup> The verb ἐπιστεύσαμεν is probably an ingressive aorist, highlighting entrance into belief; most of the English versions recognize this by translating, e.g., “when we became believers” (NRSV; NET) or “when first we believed” (NIV; NLT; ESV). See Cranfield.

<sup>429</sup> Many of the patristic commentators took this view (see Schelkle, “Biblische und patristische Eschatologie,” 365–66); see also Stuart; Haldane; Hodge; Lenski.

<sup>430</sup> See the notes on 5:9.

<sup>431</sup> See, e.g., Käsemann; Dautzenberg, “Was bleibt von der Naherwartung?” 361–74. Dunn, who thinks that Paul does speak out of a certainty of a near parousia, nevertheless (somewhat unconvincingly) denies that this invalidates the exhortations based on it.

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time, our hope is stimulated, and our watchfulness aroused.”<sup>432</sup> Christ’s return is the next event in God’s plan; Paul knew it could take place at any time and sought to prepare Christians—both in his generation and in ours—for that “blessed hope.”<sup>433</sup>

**12b** The first pair of imperatives that Paul builds on the imminence of Christ’s return uses the imagery of changing clothes: “putting off” one set in order to “put on” another. This language was widely used with metaphorical associations in the ancient world, and the NT writers adopt it as a vivid way of picturing the change of values that accompanies, and is required by, conversion to Christ.<sup>434</sup> Many scholars think that the eschatological imagery of night giving way to day that Paul has just used (vv. 11b, 12a) influences Paul’s choice of this metaphor here: Christians are to put off their “night” clothes and put on their “day” clothes.<sup>435</sup> The connection is possible, although the metaphor is so widespread p 840 that there is no need to posit such a point of contact.<sup>436</sup> Equally common as an image of morality is the contrast between darkness and light that Paul uses to characterize what Christians are to “put off” and “put on.” Particularly

<sup>432</sup> Alford.

<sup>433</sup> For this general perspective see esp. A. Moore, *Parousia*; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 487–97; and, on this passage, Godet, 449–50; Murray, 2.167–69; Cranfield, 2.683–84. On the related issue of apocalyptic and imminence, see I. Marshall, “Is Apocalyptic the Mother?” 32–42; Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 176–81; Baird, “Pauline Eschatology,” 314–27.

<sup>434</sup> The contrast with both verbs occurs also in Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8, 12. The verb ἀποτίθημι in this sense is found also in Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1; ἐνδύω in Eph. 6:11, 14; 1 Thess. 5:8. Significantly, these last three all have as their object “armor” or a specific piece of armor. Some scholars (e.g., Black; Michel) think the imagery may reflect the ritual change of clothes associated with the early Christian baptismal liturgy. But there is no evidence for the ceremony being this early (Dunn).

<sup>435</sup> E.g., Dunn. The aorist tenses Paul uses in both v. 12 (hortatory subjunctive ἐνδυσώμεθα) and v. 14 (imperative ἐνδύσασθε) do not, in themselves, point to a “one-time” action; in context, both actions are probably to be done as often as needed. Fanning (*Verbal Aspect*, 362–63) notes the prevalence of the aorist with verbs of “clothing” and suggests that in this verse, and in v. 14, Paul is capturing a process in a single image.

<sup>436</sup> Michel points out that it was not apparently the custom for people to put on one set of clothes in place of another for the day (see also Cranfield).



significant here is that in the OT, Judaism, and the NT, the contrast is extended into eschatology, with darkness characterizing the present evil age and light the new age of salvation.<sup>437</sup> The darkness of night, as the time when those bent on evil and mischief are particularly active, becomes an image for the evil realm, that “old age” which continues to exert its influence and to which Christians are not to be conformed (12:2). The light/darkness contrast is, of course, a natural extension of the day/night imagery of vv. 11–12a; see also 1 Thess. 5:4–5: “But you, brothers and sisters, are not in *darkness* so that *the day* [the ‘day of the Lord’; see v. 2] should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of *the light* and children of *the day*. We do not belong to *the night* or to *the darkness*.” The “works of darkness” that Paul urges us to renounce are therefore those activities that are typical of that evil realm.<sup>438</sup> In their place, we are to put on “the weapons<sup>439</sup> of light,” weapons appropriate for those who have been “delivered from the dominion of darkness” and been “qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:13, 12). We need such weapons both to defend and to extend the light.<sup>440</sup> Paul switches from “works” to “weapons” because, as Calvin notes, “we are to carry on a warfare for the Lord.”<sup>441</sup>

13 Paul now derives a second pair of contrasted commands from his teaching about the nearness of the Lord’s return. This contrast employs the very popular imagery of “walking” as a way of speaking about one’s daily conduct.<sup>442</sup> Our manner of life, Paul

<sup>437</sup> See esp. Amos 5:18, 20; Isa. 60:19–20; 1 En. 10:5; 92:4–5; 108:11; 2 Bar. 18:2; 48:50; and esp. Qumran, where “the sons of the light” were sharply distinguished from “the sons of darkness” in an eschatological context (e.g., 1QS 1:9; 2:16; 3:13; 1QM 1:1, passim). In the NT, see, e.g., Matt. 4:16; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 22:5.

<sup>438</sup> The genitive τοῦ σκότους is probably qualitative; see Cranfield.

<sup>439</sup> The word ὄπλα could mean “instruments” (Godet, who thinks the reference is to “the garments of the laborious workman”), but the parallel text in 1 Thess. 5:8 strongly argues for the meaning “weapons” (and see the notes on 6:13).

<sup>440</sup> The genitive φωτός is again probably descriptive; see Cranfield.

<sup>441</sup> Calvin.

<sup>442</sup> On the NT use of περιπατέω and its background in Judaism, see n. 374 on 6:4. Paul does not explicitly contrast two imperative verbs in this verse; but the hortatory subjunctive περιπατήσωμεν

urges, is to be “decent,” a word that suggests a decorous and “becoming” deportment, a lifestyle “appropriate” to those who live in the full light of the day.<sup>443</sup> Paul’s addition of the phrase “as in the day” p 841 may simply accentuate this metaphor,<sup>444</sup> but the use of the same term in v. 12 with reference to the “day of Christ” strongly suggests that Paul intends more than a metaphor. But it is not clear whether Paul is also carrying over from v. 12 the futurity of the day—in which case he would be urging us to “walk decently *as if* we were in the day”<sup>445</sup>—or whether he has shifted to the present element of that “day”—in which case he is exhorting us to “walk decently as those who are *already* in the day.”<sup>446</sup> The latter alternative is, however, more in keeping with Paul’s typical combination of the “already” and the “not yet” in his eschatological perspective. Christians eagerly wait for the coming of the day (in its final phase) even as they experience, by faith, the power and blessings of that day in its present phase.

In contrast to the “decent” conduct that we are to exhibit, Paul lists three pairs of vices that we are to avoid. It seems evident that Paul has chosen the first two pairs especially to match the metaphor of darkness/night that he has been using; for excessive drinking<sup>447</sup> and sexual misbehavior<sup>448</sup> are especially “sins of the night.”

governs both εὐσχημόνως (the positive command) and the series of datives beginning with [μὴ] κώμοις.

<sup>443</sup> Paul uses the adverb εὐσχημόνως also in 1 Thess. 4:2 with the verb περιπατέω and in 1 Cor. 14:40. The corresponding adjective, εὐσχήμων, occurs in 1 Cor. 7:35 and 12:24; the noun εὐσχημοσύνη in 1 Cor. 12:23. (The concentration of these terms in 1 Corinthians is probably no accident; and it suggests, by way of contrast with the Corinthians’ errors, the flavor of the terms.)

<sup>444</sup> E.g., Byrne.

<sup>445</sup> E.g., Barrett. Godet combines this with the metaphorical allusion.

<sup>446</sup> Cranfield; Wilckens; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 493. Käsemann: “you do in fact stand under the sign of the new day.”

<sup>447</sup> The word κώμος originally referred to a festal banquet, but took on a negative meaning, “excessive feasting,” “carousing” (see also Wis. 14:23; 2 Macc. 6:4; Gal. 5:21; 1 Pet. 4:3; see Dunn). The word μέθη (13 LXX occurrences; Luke 21:34; Gal. 5:21) means “drunkenness” (see also its cognates: μέθυσος, “drunkard” [1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10]; and μεθύω, “be drunk” [Matt. 24:49; John 2:10; Acts 2:15; 1 Cor. 11:21; 1 Thess. 5:7; Rev. 17:2, 6]).

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“Strife”<sup>449</sup> and “jealousy”<sup>450</sup> do not so naturally fit here; and Paul may have chosen them with a view ahead to his rebuke of the Roman Christians for their divisiveness and mutual criticism (see [14:1–15:13](#)).

p 842 **14** Paul’s final pair of contrasted imperatives are not so obviously related as those in [vv. 12b](#) and [13](#). The positive command picks up the verb “put on” from [v. 12b](#). Now, however, what we are to put on is not a suit of armor but Christ himself. The exact meaning of what Paul intends is not easy to pinpoint. But perhaps we should view the imperative in light of his understanding of Christ as a corporate figure. As a result of our baptism/conversion, we have been incorporated into Christ, sharing his death, burial, and (proleptically) his resurrection ([Rom. 6:3–6](#)). Our “old man,” our corporate identity with Adam, has been severed ([Rom. 6:6](#)); and in its place, we have become attached to the “new man” ([Col. 3:10–11](#); [Eph. 2:15](#)), Jesus Christ himself ([Eph. 4:13](#)), whom we have “put on” ([Gal. 3:27](#)). But our relationship to Christ, the new man, while established at conversion, needs constantly to be reappropriated and lived out, as [Eph. 4:24](#), with its call to “put on the new man” makes clear. Against this background, Paul’s exhortation to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”<sup>451</sup> means that we are consciously to embrace Christ in such a way that his character is manifested in all that we do and say.<sup>452</sup>

<sup>448</sup> Paul links *κοίτη* (“sexual intercourse” [see the notes on [Rom. 9:10](#)]; here sexual excesses) with *ἀσελγείαις*, “acts of licentiousness” (a general term for “unseemly” behavior of all kinds, though often with reference to sexual immorality [H. Bauernfeind, *TDNT* 1.490; see [Wis. 14:26](#); [3 Macc. 2:26](#); [Mark 7:22](#); [2 Cor. 12:21](#); [Gal. 5:19](#); [Eph. 4:19](#); [1 Pet. 4:3](#); [2 Pet. 2:2, 7, 18](#); [Jude 4](#)]).

<sup>449</sup> ἔρις; see also [Rom. 1:29](#); [1 Cor. 1:11](#); [3:3](#); [2 Cor. 12:20](#); [Gal. 5:20](#); [Phil. 1:15](#); [1 Tim. 6:4](#).

<sup>450</sup> ζήλος can have a neutral or even positive meaning, “zeal” (see [John 2:17](#); [Rom. 10:2](#); [2 Cor. 7:7, 11](#); [9:2](#); [11:2](#); [Phil. 3:6](#); [Heb. 10:27](#)); but it also refers, as here, to “jealousy” or “envy” ([1 Cor. 3:3](#); [Gal. 5:20](#); [Jas. 3:14, 16](#)). Note that ζήλος and ἔρις occur together also in [1 Cor. 3:3](#) and in the list of vices in [Gal. 5:19–21](#). What we have in this verse, then, is a mini vice list, such as is often used by NT authors to characterize sinful and unchristian conduct (see [Rom. 1:29–31](#)).

<sup>451</sup> Paul’s use of the full expression τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, and esp. his inclusion of κύριος (“Lord”), stresses the totality of the act and its implications for all of life (Murray).

<sup>452</sup> See esp. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 223–24; see also Dunn. Dunn also refers to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who, referring to an actor, says that he “put on Tarquin” (τὸν Ταρκύνιον ἐνδύεσθαι),

This exhortation appears to match the exhortation at the beginning of this section, “be transformed by the renewing of the mind,” suggesting that it is into the image of Christ that we are being transformed (8:29).<sup>453</sup>

As the negative counterpart to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul warns us, “make no provision<sup>454</sup> for the flesh, to carry out its desires.”<sup>455</sup> “Flesh” (Gk. *sarx*) might have a neutral meaning here, Paul’s point being that we should not pay special attention to the demands of our human nature so as to let them dominate us.<sup>456</sup> But the term more likely lies more toward the negative end of its spectrum of meaning: “flesh” as that principle and power of life in this world p 843 which tends to pull us away from the spiritual realm.<sup>457</sup> As he does in Galatians (5:13–26), Paul implies concern that his proclamation of freedom from the law (vv. 8–10) might lead to a licentious lifestyle. Thus he urges his readers, in place of the law, to embrace Christ—who, through the Spirit, provides completely for victory over the flesh.

e.g., “played the part of Tarquin.” The text may help explain the origin of the metaphor, but the meaning that Paul gives it is rooted in his particular view of salvation history.

<sup>453</sup> See M. B. Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 151–52. Both Thompson and Dunn (“Paul’s Knowledge,” 198) suggest that Paul would also be thinking of Christians modeling their behavior according to the pattern of Christ’s life.

<sup>454</sup> Paul uses the middle, ποιείσθε, because it was customary with the object πρόνοιαν, “provision” (BDAG; Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, §227). The word πρόνοια, which was used outside the NT of God’s “foresight,” occurs in the NT only with reference to human foresight, concern, or provision (see Acts 24:2; BDAG).

<sup>455</sup> The phrase εἰς ἐπιθυμίας could conceivably be the object of ποιείσθε πρόνοιαν, but this construction is usually followed by the genitive (see σαρκός). The phrase εἰς ἐπιθυμίας may therefore function as a separate clause, probably with a consecutive meaning (see Godet).

<sup>456</sup> E.g., Godet.

<sup>457</sup> E.g., Murray; Michel; Käsemann; Cranfield. Dunn holds a more nuanced view (see the notes on 1:3), which has much to be said for it (see also Denney).

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