

Chapter 10

If Romans 13 is About Secular Government to which Christians Must Submit, the Apostle Paul Contradicts the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5

[E]lders ... Feed the flock of God ... taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.... Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.... (1 Peter 5:1-5)

The Apostle Peter begins this chapter much the same as the Apostle Paul begins Romans 13. Both Apostles are discussing biblically qualified authorities—that is, elders or overseers—some of whom would serve as judges in Romans 13 *ecclesias*. Both Paul and Peter likewise require submission to these ministers of God who represent Yahweh and His law. This is in contrast to resistance to those who are but mere powers:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil; as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom *resist* stedfast in the faith.... (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Peter provides us with a clear distinction regarding our responses to both [God-ordained authorities and God-established powers](#). Only the former is *due* our allegiance.

Vigilance

Verse 8 begins with Peter charging his readers to be vigilant. The opposite is denounced by Yahweh as resting on one's lees:

...I will search Jerusalem ... and punish the men that are settled on their lees. (Zephaniah 1:12)

The reason for God's displeasure is explained by the Prophet Zechariah:

I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, *they furthered the disaster*. (Zechariah 1:15, NASB)

Although not actively engaged in waging war against God and His kingdom, their neglect in promoting the kingdom or in engaging the enemy contributed to advancing the cause of Yahweh's adversaries.

I wouldn't be at all surprised to discover Edmund Burke's famous quotation—"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing"—was inspired by Zechariah 1:15.

We are to be vigilant watchmen, ready to sound the alarm and take appropriate action against any assault upon the truth:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old

ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, *turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness*, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:3-4)

Where the King James translated *aselgeian* as “lasciviousness,” the New American Standard Bible translates it as “licentiousness.” In his 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster defined “licentiousness” as “excessive indulgence of liberty; contempt of the just restraints of law....”¹ By their rejection of His law, antinomians turn Yahweh’s grace into licentiousness; they are humanists dressed in Christian attire. Without God’s moral compass, every man is a law unto himself:

In those days ... every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)

Jude’s warning applies to anyone whose antinomianism turns God’s grace or anything else into an occasion for lawlessness. The teaching that Romans 13 is about secular government facilitates lawlessness on the societal level. If Paul is advocating indiscriminate submission to government that’s spurned Yahweh as its sovereign and thus His moral law as society’s standard, he would be culpable for advancing antinomianism in the worst possible way.

Damnable Doctrines

The Greek word *krima* translated “condemnation” in Jude 1:4 is also found in Romans 13, translated “damnation”:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher authorities. For there is no authority but of God: the authorities that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the authority, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves *damnation*. (Romans 13:1-2)

Whatever Paul is teaching is a matter of condemnation for those who get it wrong. Are those who teach that Romans 13 is about secular government prepared to say resisting the powers of secular government (i.e., government that’s repudiated Yahweh as its sovereign and His law as supreme) will bring damnation upon those who resist those same powers? *I hope not!*

The *only* thing that makes sense of Paul’s warning of damnation is that he’s instead describing a biblical civil body politic—an *ecclesia* governed by biblically qualified judges representing Yahweh. To resist [*their authority*](#) amounts to contempt of God’s court of law. Such contempt is damned as a capital crime:

And thou shalt come unto ... the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence ... and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto ... the judge, *even that man shall die*: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously. (Deuteronomy 17:9-13)

We need to be vigilant against any sedition opposed to Yahweh’s law order, including the “damnable” teaching that Romans 13 is about secular government.

Roaring, Devouring Lions

Christian vigilance includes resisting the lions among us. In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter does not command us to submit to, but to *resist* the devil. *If* the devil here is meant to be taken literally, resisting Satan would demand we also resist his representatives here on earth, especially those in influential positions in government. This would put Peter at odds with either Paul in Romans 13 *or* with those who believe we're obligated to submit to or even just content ourselves with secular government.

But what if Peter's not referring to Satan but to some other adversary?

The Hebrew and Greek words *satan* should have never been transliterated² but instead translated³ "adversary" in all instances, allowing the context to determine what adversary the author has in mind.⁴ The same is true with the Greek word *diabolos*. It should have been translated "slanderer" or "false accuser," as in 1 Timothy 3:11 and 2 Timothy 3:3. The word *diabolos* does not mean devil. It means one who slanders or libels others and should have been consistently translated so as to reflect this.

Remove the hybrid word "devil"⁵ so as not to be unduly influenced and it's clear Peter has someone else in mind.

The word "adversary" in 1 Peter 5:8 is derived from the Greek word *antidikos*. It literally means "an opponent (in a lawsuit)."⁶ This false accuser is depicted by Peter as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. If we allow the Bible to be its own commentary, it's explicit as to whom such terminology applies?

As a roaring lion ... so is a wicked ruler over the poor people. (Proverbs 28:15)

Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. (Jeremiah 50:17)

They [Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar] shall roar together like lions.... (Jeremiah 51:38)

David, Solomon, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah all equate oppressive tyrants with roaring, devouring lions.⁷ Hence, we understand Peter was not depicting some mystical unseen entity but instead a despot who falsely accused Christians, opposed them at law, and had them executed. What false accuser at the time Peter wrote his first epistle both falsely accused Christians and was intent on destroying them? None other than Nero, who, among other things, falsely accused Christians of burning down Rome and who murdered Christians at his pleasure.

Peter was not warning Christians of some unseen demon of darkness but of that devil Nero and others like him. Peter not only warned Christians regarding Nero, he also charged them to resist him:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the [false accuser]; as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom *resist* stedfast in the faith.... (1 Peter 5:8-9)

This is precisely what the disciples were accused of doing in Acts 17:

[L]ewd fellows of the baser sort ... drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city [intending to incriminate them at law], crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also ... and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another King, one Jesus. (Acts 17:5-7)

One resists a despot by declaring allegiance to another King and obeying his laws, rather than the usurper's anywhere the two are opposed to each other.

Unless you're determined to pit Peter against Paul, this effectively counters the teaching that Romans 13 or [1 Peter 2](#) are about secular government. We *are* obliged to find peace with such powers wherever we can, per Romans 12:18.⁸ We are *not* obligated to either submit to or content ourselves with biblically adverse, seditious powers.

Paul is not in conflict with Peter because Paul does *not* teach submission to Nero or to any secular government in Romans 13. Instead, he depicts a biblical *ecclesia*, a civil body politic like those established by the Puritans in 17th-century America, which were a [blessing to the righteous](#) and a [terror to the wicked](#).

Resistance, Not Rebellion

To what degree we resist depends upon to what extent secular governments (when in power) have rebelled against our King. For example, nearly all governments view murder as a crime. There is, therefore, no need for resistance in such instances. However, not all governments deem murder a capital crime. Therefore, Christians should oppose their violation of Yahweh's mandatory death penalty for murderers.⁹

Nevertheless, it is not for us to rebel. Ours is to submit to our King. This, in turn, requires we seek first *His* kingdom and *His* righteousness, which, in turn, means eventually establishing *His* government here on earth as it is in heaven.¹⁰ Those who labor to this end will, at times, inevitably be accused of rebellion and sedition against the powers that be, as the disciples were in Acts 4, 5, and 17. Our response should begin with:

[A] pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. (Titus 2:7-8)

If those in power persist in labeling it rebellion, then:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. (1 Peter 4:12-16)

The United States Constitutional Republic

Not all secular rulers are of the same disposition as Nero—roaring, devouring lions who falsely accuse the righteous of doing evil—but today’s Constitutional Republic *is* of that very same nature. It’s a *diabolos* government that falsely accuses the righteous of doing evil. This is essentially the same as depicted in Isaiah 5:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!.... Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! ...because they have cast away the law of Yahweh of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah 5:20-24)

Such governments revile good as evil and legitimize evil as good. Case in point: the Constitutional Republic, which, among other similar atrocities, legalizes sodomite unions as marriages in violation of Leviticus 18:22 and that, in turn, prosecutes Christians who in their businesses refuse to accommodate this abomination.

The estimated 3,800 infants per day butchered in their mothers’ wombs since *Roe v. Wade* (sanctioned and financed by today’s secular government) also testify to the Constitutional Republic’s *diabolos* nature. I doubt Nero was responsible for murdering anywhere near 58 million and counting innocent lives.

Not all secular powers are as bad as Nero, but today’s American secular powers are and should therefore be exposed and reprovved per Ephesians 5:11 and resisted according to 1 Peter 5:8-9.

But that’s not enough. That’s not all that’s required of us regarding such despotic governments. Don’t forget our duty as Christians includes seeking first God’s kingdom and His righteousness¹⁰ and therefore doing all we can toward establishing His government based upon His moral law here on earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ Thus, reproof and resistance are not enough. Our responsibility includes *overcoming* evil with good¹² everywhere we can:

We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Eventually, this must also include [overcoming secular government with biblical government](#)—that is, Paul’s Romans 13 government established under the authority of [ministers of God](#).

Related posts:

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1. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “licentiousness” (1828; reprint ed. San Francisco, CA: The Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).

2. Transliteration commutes the *letters of a word* from one language to another. Personal names are almost always *transliterated*, whereas other words are *translated*.

3. Translation commutes the *meaning of a word* from one language to another.

4. The Hebrew and Greek words *satan* are used to describe many adversaries in the Bible: men, the angel of Yahweh, even Yahweh Himself, etc. Listen to audio series "Spooks: Are They For Real?," beginning at <http://www.missiontoisrael.org/tapelist.php#T199>.

5. "Devil" is neither a transliteration, nor a translation of *diabolos*. It's a religiously-biased hybrid.

6. James Strong, *antidikos*, "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament," *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990) p. 13.

7. Psalm 14:4, 17:9-12; Proverbs 19:12, 20:12, 28:15; Jeremiah 50:17, 51:38; and Zephaniah 3:3.

8. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18)

9. Genesis 9:5-6; Exodus 21:14; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:31-33, etc.

10. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...." (Matthew 6:10, 33)

11. [*A Biblical Constitution: A Scriptural Replacement for Secular Government*](#)

See also series of ten online books on each of the Ten Commandments and their respective statutes, and judgments, beginning with [*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*](#)

12. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21)