

ROMANS CHAPTER 13

Covenant Submission, Love as Torah Fulfillment, and Walking as Children of Light

Romans Chapter 13 continues the practical application that began in Chapter 12. After explaining the mercy of YaHuWaH, the transformation of the mind, the unity of the covenant body, and the character expected of those restored through Messiah, Sha'ul now addresses how the people of Elohim live within the present world. This chapter has often been misunderstood because it contains Sha'ul's teaching concerning governing authorities. Some have used it to demand unquestioning obedience to human governments, while others have rejected it because of the abuses committed by rulers throughout history. However, Sha'ul's teaching must be understood within the larger biblical framework: YaHuWaH is the ultimate authority. Human authority is accountable to Him. The covenant people are called to represent His Kingdom while living among the kingdoms of this world. Romans 13 is not about surrendering allegiance to earthly powers. It is about living as a people whose behavior reflects the righteousness and order of YaHuWaH.

Historical Setting: The Assembly in Rome

To understand Romans 13, the historical context of Rome is important. The believers in Rome lived under the authority (Imperial cult) of the Roman Empire during the reign of Emperor Nero. The assembly included both those from Yisra'El and those from the nations who had joined themselves to the Messiah of Yisra'El. They were learning how to live as a covenant people while existing within a pagan imperial system. This created difficult questions: How should followers of Messiah relate to governing authorities? How should they respond to injustice? How should they represent the Kingdom of Elohim? Sha'ul's answer begins by reminding them that YaHuWaH remains sovereign over all creation.

Every Authority Comes From Elohim

Sha'ul begins:

"Let every being be subject to the authorities over him. For there is no authority except from Elohim, and the authorities that exist have been appointed by Elohim." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:1

The word authority is connected with the Greek concept of governing power or delegated authority. But the Hebraic foundation is important. Scripture repeatedly declares that YaHuWaH is the supreme ruler over kings and nations.

Daniel declared:

"He removes sovereigns and raises up sovereigns. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who know understanding." - Dani'El (Daniel) 2:21

Human rulers do not exist independently of YaHuWaH's authority. However, this does not mean every action of every ruler is approved by YaHuWaH. Scripture records many rulers who acted wickedly: Pharaoh. Nebuchadnezzar. Herod. The kings of Yisra'El who turned away from YaHuWaH. The authority itself exists under Elohim's sovereignty, but rulers remain accountable for how they exercise that authority.

Authority and Accountability

The Torah establishes that leaders are not above righteousness.

Moses commanded:

"You shall not show partiality in judgment. Hear the small and the great alike. Do not be afraid of anyone's presence, for the judgment belongs to Elohim." - Debarim (Deuteronomy) 1:17

Earthly authority is meant to uphold justice. When rulers act against righteousness, they violate the very purpose for which authority exists. The prophets regularly confronted kings when they departed from YaHuWaH's ways. Natan confronted Dawid. Elijah confronted Ahab. Yoḥanan the Immerser confronted Herodes. Submission does not mean silence toward wickedness. The people of Elohim are always called to honor authority while remaining faithful to the highest authority, YaHuWaH.

The Purpose of Governing Authority

Sha'ul writes:

"For rulers are not a fear to good works, but to evil." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:3

The purpose of authority is justice. This reflects the Hebrew concept of **mishpat** (משפט). Mishpat is righteous judgment, the proper ordering of society according to YaHuWaH's standards. When authority protects life, restrains evil, and maintains justice, it reflects an aspect of YaHuWaH's order. When authority promotes rebellion, injustice, and oppression, it opposes His purpose.

The Servant of Elohim

Sha'ul calls the governing authority:

"For it is Elohim's servant to you for good." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:4

The word servant connects with the concept of service. In Hebrew thought, leadership is not primarily about privilege. It is responsibility. The greatest leaders in Scripture were servants. Mosheh was called the servant of YaHuWaH. Dawid was called a servant.

Messiah Yahusha Himself declared:

"But whoever wishes to become great among you, let him be your servant." - Mattithyahu (Matthew) 20:26

True authority reflects the character of the King when it serves righteousness.

The Believer's Conscience

Sha'ul writes:

"Therefore it is necessary to be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:5

This returns to the theme of the renewed mind. The covenant person does not obey merely because of fear of punishment. The transformed heart seeks righteousness because it desires to please YaHuWaH.

This connects with the promise of the renewed covenant:

"And I shall put My Torah in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts." - Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 31:33

The inward work of YaHuWaH produces righteous behavior.

Paying What Is Owed

Sha'ul continues:

"Render therefore to all what is owed: taxes to whom taxes are owed, respect to whom respect is owed, and appreciation to whom appreciation is owed." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:7

This reflects Torah principles concerning honesty and responsibility. YaHuWaH commands His people to avoid oppression and dishonesty. The covenant person does not live as a rebellious person seeking to exploit others. They live with integrity.

The Greatest Debt: Love

Sha'ul then moves to the heart of the chapter:

"Owe no one any matter except to love one another, for he who loves another has filled the Torah." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:8

This verse is often misunderstood. Some interpret "love fulfills Torah" as meaning love replaces Torah. But Sha'ul's wording does not support that. He says love fulfills Torah because true love produces obedience to the purpose of Torah. The Hebrew word for love, **ahav** (אהב), is covenant action. Love seeks the good of another according to YaHuWaH's standard. Human emotion alone cannot define love. YaHuWaH defines love through His instruction.

Love Does No Harm

Sha'ul explains:

"For this, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other command, it is summed up in this word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" - Romiyim (Romans) 13:9

Notice what Sha'ul does. He quotes Torah. He does not say Torah has passed away. He identifies love (**ahav**) as the proper expression of Torah. The commands he lists come directly from the Ten Words. Love does not abolish commandments. Love explains their purpose. A person who truly loves their neighbor will not murder, steal, lie, or covet.

Love as Torah's Full Expression

Sha'ul concludes:

"Love does no evil to a neighbor. Therefore, love is completion of the Torah." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:10

The word completion again carries the idea of reaching intended purpose. Torah's purpose was always to produce a people who reflect the righteousness and character of YaHuWaH. Messiah demonstrated this perfectly. He loved through obedience. He loved through sacrifice. He loved through faithfulness to the Father.

Wake Up From Sleep

Sha'ul writes:

"And do this, knowing the time, that already it is the hour for us to wake up from sleep; for now our deliverance is nearer than when we first believed." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:11

The language of awakening is prophetic. Throughout Scripture, sleep often represents spiritual unawareness. The prophets called Yisra'El to awaken from rebellion.

Isaiah proclaimed:

"Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Tsiyon." - Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 52:1

Sha'ul is using restoration language. The people of YaHuWaH are called to recognize the season they are living in.

Put on Messiah

Sha'ul concludes:

"But put on the Master Yahusha Messiah, and make no provision for the lusts of the flesh." - Romiyim (Romans) 13:14

To "put on" Messiah is covenant language. It means to be clothed with His character. This connects with the priestly imagery of Scripture. The priests wore garments representing their service before YaHuWaH. The restored people are called to display the character of their King.

Romans 13 and the Restoration of the Whole House of Yisra'El

Romans 13 describes the life of a restored covenant people living among the nations. They are: A people under the authority of YaHuWaH. A people who honor justice. A people who serve rather than dominate. A people whose love reflects Torah. A people awakened to the coming Kingdom. This connects with the prophetic picture of Yisra'El becoming a light to the nations.

YaHuWaH said:

"I shall also give You as a light to the nations, to be My deliverance to the ends of the earth." - Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 49:6

The restored people do not withdraw from the world. They represent the King within it.

Conclusion of Romans Chapter 13

Romans 13 reveals that covenant faithfulness affects every area of life. The believer's relationship with authority, society, and others must reflect the character of YaHuWaH. The foundation is love, not human love defined by emotion, but covenant love (ahav) defined by righteousness. Love fulfills Torah because love walks according to the Creator's instructions. The restored people of Elohim are called to live awake, transformed, and faithful while awaiting the fullness of Messiah's Kingdom. Romans 14 will continue this practical instruction by addressing disagreements within the covenant community, especially concerning matters of conscience and how the strong and weak are to walk together in unity.

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