

Romans 13-16

By Trish Gerstel

Paul's statement in the opening paragraphs of Romans chapter 13 touches on a subject that has been the center of many of my recent conversations – something that I'm sure is not surprising given the current state of our nation's politics. Those who do not fully abide by this passage lean upon the argument that Christians should stand up for their beliefs and against oppression of others, and that the government in Paul's time was staunchly different than our own. What these people fail to recognize (in addition to the fact that they are rationalizing disobedience) is that Paul's instructions on the subject of submission to authority go far beyond the specifically-stated directives found in 13:1-7, and beyond Paul himself.



As we read further in the remaining chapters of Paul's letter to the Roman church, and in other areas of the Bible, we gain a deeper understanding for his teaching to “submit . . . to the governing authorities” (13:1). The backbone of

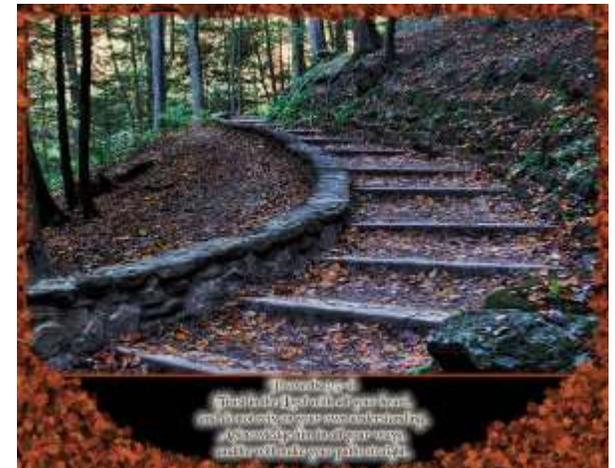
Paul's statement actually comes in 14:8, where he points out that “[i]f we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord . . . we belong to the Lord” (emphasis added). This goes along with what we read previously in chapters 6 and 8: “we are God's children” (8:16) and “have become slaves to righteousness” (6:18). In other words, we are called to do what God ordains – not what we think or feel – and our focus should be on God's work, which He has clearly stated is: 1) to believe in Jesus (John 6:29); and 2) to spread the Gospel and help others grow in Christ (Matthew 28:16-20). When God's work is the focus of our energy, there is no room for debating or standing up against a man-made institution such as the government, because we will be far too busy reaching out to those who've yet to enter into a relationship with Him.



Paul's remaining words in chapter 13 as well as those in chapters 14-16 (yes, even chapter 16, which is a flowing list of requested greetings for Paul's fellow workers by the church in Rome) further

demonstrate that our focus should be on God's perfect love. In his call to “accept him whose faith is weak,” “stop passing judgment on one another” and putting “any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way,” “make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification,” “bear with the failings of the weak,” (14:1, 14:13, 14:19, 15:1) and so on, Paul is calling us to focus our lives on having “one heart and mouth [to] glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:6) and to “accept one another . . . just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (15:7).

How then can we stand up for our beliefs and stand against oppression in a society whose laws go against God? Simply stated, we do this by trusting in the Lord to work through us in bringing people back into the fold, so that He can change their hearts. After all, “proper” laws are not where we are called to put our hope, but in God Himself (Proverbs 3:5-6).



*Scripture quotations taken from the New International Version.

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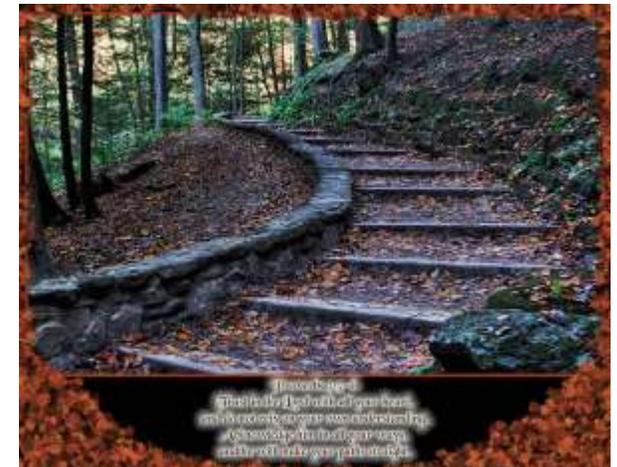
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