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The Powers *That Be*

An Exposition of Romans Thirteen Verses One to Six

by
Otis Q Sellers

FOREWORD

Some of the material in this pamphlet was first published in the September, 1941 issue of **The Word of Truth**. The whole subject has been carefully reconsidered, the article rewritten, and much additional material has been added. The widespread interest in the subject is of such nature that it appeared wise to rewrite and enlarge the manuscript. It is sent forth in prayer that it will lead many to see the importance of recognizing the Acts 28:28 dispensation.

August 1, 1943.

Otis Q. Sellers

The Powers That Be

A great foundation principle in the science of logic, one often stated but which needs constant repetition, is that we cannot reason from the particular to the general. For example: the only possible way for me to prove my citizenship in the United States unless the one who demands the proof will accept the great general truth that all men born in this country automatically become citizens. If this general truth is rejected, then there is no way of proving the particular truth of my personal citizenship.

The study presented in these pages deals with a particular truth which depends for its validity entirely upon the great general truth that the words of Paul in Acts 28:28 mark a dispensational division and that they brought about a definite administrative change. If the reader has entered into and accepted this great general truth, then the particular truth presented here will follow as a natural sequence.

Those who see in Acts 28:28 nothing more than a passing remark of Paul, in which he set forth something which had been true before, therefore, made no change and introduced nothing new, may just as well cast this pamphlet aside without reading it. This message is written for those who recognize that Paul's declaration brought about a new dispensation and a change in administration.

However, while man cannot reason from the particular to the general, yet a particular truth often an intimation, which if followed out will lead the student to a full consideration of the general truth. It is sincerely hoped that this will be true in regard to the particular truth set forth here.

Two years ago it was my privilege to publish in the pages of **The Word of Truth** (Sellers' original Bible study magazine. Still available in hard copy or now also in CD format.) an exposition of Romans 13:1-6 under the title of *The Powers That Be*. This study was enthusiastically received by hundreds because of the help that it offered upon this difficult passage which has so long been an enigma to so many. It created much interest, it brought forth words of thanks from readers who had been troubled by the evasive and inconsistent interpretations usually given of this passage, and it confirmed and increased the faith of many in the fact of the peculiar nature of the Pentecostal Administration. [By "Pentecostal Administration" I mean that administration of God which was in effect from the Pentecost until the pronouncement of Paul's words recorded in Acts 28:28. It covered a period of thirty-three years, and its history is recorded in the book of Acts. Anyone can see that this administration under which a ruler dies because he failed to give God the glory (Acts 12:2) is quite different from the present administration of grace under which rulers live on and even though they never recognize God.]

Most definite result of all was that some were led by it to see the great light-bringing the Acts 28:28 dispensational division.

At the same time, as would be expected, the article produced some unfavorable reaction and criticism. This criticism has been carefully considered, none of it has been ignored. Criticism does not upset me and I do not react unfavorably to it, nevertheless, after consideration that all this criticism was illogical and unreasonable. It seemed that without exception many were guilty of the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi*, which means, ignoring the point in dispute. I ignored altogether my contention that Romans 13 does not refer to civil authorities, they thought that I believed and taught that we should not obey any government, then they set forth to me by proving that we should. [I regret that much of this criticism was spoken, therefore, no accurate record of it. The only published criticism of my article that came to my notice was that of Mr. Charles F. Baker, Pastor of the Fundamental Bible Church of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His criticism will be replied to as follows: Mr. Baker says: "The Jewish religious leaders in Acts 5 whom the apostles refused to obey were not in any sense the 'higher powers'. Caesar and his appointed governors held that position, as Paul demonstrated when he refused to submit to these Jewish leaders and appealed to Caesar. Acts 25:10-11. Nowhere do we find any apostles refusing to submit to the Roman civil authority." Such reasoning as this is childish and extreme and is unworthy of a man of Mr. Baker's ability. He cannot believe that the apostles had been before Caesar or his governors they would not have said, "We can speak the things which we have seen and heard" or "We must obey God rather than man." I cannot possibly believe this, yet he confuses the whole subject by injecting this false note. The answer of the apostles would have been the same even if Caesar himself had forced them to preach.]

They played upon the idea that since I do not believe that the Christian's duty to governments is what is taught in Romans 13, I do not believe that the Christian has any obligation to his government.

In view of this, it seems good to state at the very beginning of this pamphlet that it is my conviction that human government is of God. By this I do not mean all governments are of God, neither do I mean this form of it or that form of it. But I do believe that it is the mind of God that men should be governed by men. To me, this is positively set forth in the great principle established in Genesis 9:5-6 where we find the principle of the government of man by man. The highest function of human government is the judicial taking of life, and all lesser governmental powers are implied in this. Man is responsible to govern the world for the glory of God, therefore, men must accept the rule of others.

Many governments are intolerably bad, but since we are unable to make the crooked straight, it is not our place to meddle in or seek to improve any government. We must, if believers, submit to God in the situation in which we find ourselves, no matter how intolerable, unless it violates the will of God for us. We are to be subject to civil authorities in all things unless our conscience is not involved.

I am and have always been a true patriot. I love my country and support its interests and institutions. No one has ever found me at any time in opposition to its duly constituted authorities. I pray that the time will never come when for the sake of conscience, opposition will be necessary. No bitter, harsh or critical words have ever come from lips in regard to those who are in authority in this land. I shall be ever loyal to my government in all matters except those that are contrary to the light I have received. However, this conception of my duty as a citizen is in no way based upon the teaching of Romans 13. It is my understanding that that passage does not contain a single line of teaching concerning civil authorities.

Romans 13:1-7 in the King James Version reads as follows:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, he will be afraid of thee: for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

The reader will notice at once that the language here is somewhat antiquated, therefore for the sake of clarity let us consider the passage in more accurate version. The student will find this especially helpful in securing a better understanding of this portion.

Let every soul be in subjection to the superior authorities, for there is no authority that is not by God. The authorities which exist have been arranged by God, so that he who resisteth authority has withstood God's arrangement. And they who do withstand shall receive judgment upon themselves. For they who bear rule are not feared by right-doers, but by wrongdoers.

You desire — do you not — to have no reason to be in fear of the authority? Well, do that which is right, and then he will commend you. For he is God's servant for you. But if you do what is wrong, be afraid, for he does not wear the sword to no purpose. He is God's servant — an avenger to inflict punishment upon evil-doers. Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only because of punishment, but because of conscience sake.

For because of this you are paying taxes also, for they are God's ministers, perpetually for this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues; taxes to whom taxes are due. to whom tribute, fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor. Romans 13:1-7. Revised Version.

This passage has been almost universally interpreted as speaking of civil authorities. Therefore, when it is read by the average Bible reader he understands that this passage teaches the believer his duty toward kings, presidents, dictators, magistrates, policemen and all such rulers and authorities. Out of thirteen commentaries on the book of Romans which have been consulted, all of them hold that this passage sets forth the Christian's duty toward government. One of these commentators somewhat despairingly states that it has to refer to all rulers as there is no one else of whom it can speak; and most commentators provide a logical way of escape from their own interpretations by insisting that the teaching here does not apply to the conscience toward God enters into the matter. They ignore the fact that this means of escape is denied to them by the statement made in Verse 5: "Wherefore ye must needs be subject to the higher powers for conscience sake."

It can be readily seen that the meaning of this entire passage depends entirely upon just what is meant by higher powers or superior authorities. If these words signify civil authorities such as kings, prime ministers, presidents and dictators, then every statement that follows is true of these. But if these two words do not signify civil authorities, then no statement that follows is necessarily true of them.

In examining this portion, let us admit for the moment that these words do speak of civil authorities, and that this passage does set forth the Christian's duty toward his government by applying each statement to earthly rulers we will discover how untenable this traditional interpretation is.

Romans 13:1

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. This opening statement would apply only under subjection to the "higher powers" or spiritual authorities as it should be translated. This would require a clear distinction to be made between higher and lower powers or superior and inferior authorities. Just how this distinction is to be made, and just who the higher and lower powers are is a problem we must leave to those who insist that this passage does refer to civil authorities. In all governments those who may be classed as lesser authorities are usually working out the plans, purposes and decrees of those who are greater. For example, when Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that the whole world should be taxed, the taxing would be done by minor authorities. Could one have refused to pay the tax until Caesar came personally?

Any attempt to make a distinction between higher and lower powers in human government would result in a breakdown of all authority. Therefore, it is evident that the very words superior authorities would indicate that this passage does not speak of human rulers, no matter how high among men their authority may be. In fact, it appears that Paul used this term here so that

would never confuse these "higher powers" with civil authorities. But they have done it of this safeguard.

For there is no power but of God. If this passage does speak of civil rulers, then it is that all kings, dictators and presidents derive their authority and right to rule from God. I do not believe this are forced to believe in the "divine right of kings". I do not believe in the divine right of kings, therefore, it is impossible for me to believe that the rulers of this world derive their authority from God. Hitler now rules over Norway, Holland and France. The Japanese rule the Philippines. Did this power come from God, and do they derive their authority from Him? He will say "God permits it", but there is nothing about permission in Romans 13:1.

The powers that be are ordained of God. The Greek word here translated "ordained" means arranged, and the passage should read: The authorities which exist have been arranged by God. Blind faith may accept this because it feels that it is what the Bible teaches, but an enlightened and instructed faith will ask if the Bible really teaches that present day rulers are God's arrangement. It is my understanding that God is permitting the nations of the world to walk after their own ways in this which is man's day, and that all the confusion in governments is the result of man's failure and incompetency. Believing this, I cannot believe that the governmenta upon which we look today is God's arrangement. If it is, then it is what God wants, so He arranged it. It is impossible for me to believe this.

Romans 13:2

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. Paul's words here are unmistakable. They set forth absolute principles that are not subject to any modification under any circumstances. If these words speak of civil rulers, then we must admit that some of the heroes of the faith whom we honor are honored because they did the thing that is contrary to the Word of God here. History is filled with the records of heroic men who defied the civil powers of their day in order to serve and worship God according to the light they had received. We now honor them for their faith and courage, but if this passage refers to civil authorities, then we honor them for having walked contrary to the Word of God.

One of the most remarkable characters in English history is that of Oliver Cromwell. He dealt a blow at royal and ecclesiastical tyranny from which it never recovered. He resisted the authorities of his day. Did he resist the arrangement of God? Furthermore, by resisting the authority, he became the authority. If men had resisted him would they have resisted the arrangement of God?

There stand George Washington and all the signers of the Declaration of Independence who refused to be subject to the civil rulers of their day and declared their independence of them. Were they right or wrong in throwing off this yoke? If Romans 13 speaks of civil powers, then they violated every precept it contains. If the government of their day was the arrangement of God,

and if they opposed it and established another, then how can that which they established be regarded as the arrangement of God ?

Does not history abundantly witness that the highest form of Christian character has been found in those who calmly to die rather than to be subject to the ruling powers when those powers bid them do that which was contrary to their convictions? Has it not led innumerable men to stand in protest for the truth when every form of governmental authority stood arrayed against them? Did not Martin Luther refuse to be subject to the ruling powers of his day when to both Pope and Emperor he declared, "Here I stand; I can do no other; God help me! Amen!"? When he stood before the Imperial Diet at Worms it was one man against an empire.

Consider also the case of the faithful apostles when they were forbidden to speak or to bear witness to the name of Jesus.

"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4:19-20.

And when they were arrested for their refusal to obey this command they answered:

"We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29.

In doing and saying these things they resisted the ruling powers of their time.

And they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. If these words were spoken of God in regard to those who resist civil rulers, then what about the parents of Moses who were "not afraid of the king's commandment" and saved their child by it? Heb. 11:23. What about the three Hebrew children who refused to obey the decree of Nebuchadnezzar and who were promoted in the province of Babylon? Daniel 3:30. And what about Daniel who rejected the decree of Darius and who prospered in his reign? Daniel 6:28.

Romans 13:3

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Civil authorities, too numerous to mention, have been the persecutors of those who did good and have favored those who did evil. The facts of past and present history are such that it is impossible for you, me, or anyone else to believe that rulers have been a terror to those who did wrong. God's Word does not teach otherwise; therefore, it is evident that the rulers here are not civil authorities.

Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. A more accurate translation of this is interesting. "You desire — do you — to have no reason to be in fear of the authority? Well, do the thing which is right, and they will commend you."

The rulers of this world have heaped their honors upon the workers of evil, while at the same time they have degraded and debased the workers of good. Before Paul wrote these words he stated that he had frequently been in prison. This must have been at the hands of the civil authorities. How then could he tell others, "Do good and they will praise you ?"

Conybeare suggests that "this was written before the Imperial government had begun to persecute Christianity." This is true, but it explains nothing. If these words of Paul were spoken by civil authorities, then he made a great mistake in uttering them, since nothing but persecution came from the Roman civil authorities upon those who did good.

Romans 13:4

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. This statement increases the difficulty for those who believe that these words were spoken of civil authorities. I readily believe and accept that we must be "subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates" in harmony with Titus 3:1, but I cannot believe that these men are the ministers of God for our good. I know that government is good, and know that the worst form of it is still better than anarchy. I know that government is for our good, but cannot believe that governors are ministers of God.

But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain. "The sword" is a common figure of speech which means having the power to exact or inflict an extreme penalty. Many civil authorities do have this power, but in view of the words that follow, this cannot refer to them.

For he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Paul repeats that the "higher powers" of whom he was speaking were ministers of God. Furthermore, he says they are God's avengers to inflict punishment upon evildoers.

Romans 13:5

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. Language could not be more explicit. Paul tells these Romans that they must be subject to superior authorities, not just because of fear of punishment, but in order to maintain their conscience.

Commentators upon this chapter, almost without exception, say that we are not to obey civil powers if they order us to do that which is contrary to the dictates of our conscience. This passage makes it impossible for one to take advantage of any such relief. If one must be subject for the sake of his conscience, then he dare not refuse to be subject because of his conscience.

For this cause pay ye tribute also. Since the word tribute means taxes, this would seem to indicate that this passage does refer to civil authorities. If this were all that was said, the matter would be simple, for we certainly believe that taxes are necessary if government is to be maintained, therefore, they should be paid. However, it says more, and it is just here that we find another major difficulty. "

For they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. While I accept that it is my duty to pay taxes, and I do it as cheerfully as possible, yet when I go to the Internal Revenue Bureau to pay my income tax, it is utterly impossible for me to believe that the collectors are God's ministers who are doing His work in collecting these taxes.

Other Scriptures

Those who believe that the words of Romans 13 were spoken concerning civil authorities and human governments seek to support their view by bringing in other passages. Among the most famous are the words of God to Nebuchadnezzar that came through the lips of Daniel.

"To the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men." Daniel 4:17.

A more accurate translation of this passage will show that it refers specifically to Babylon. The specific truth of this passage must not be taken and made to be general truth covering all kingdoms at all times. Babylon was a world empire and the only kingdom in existence when the words were spoken. It had come very definitely into relationship with God's purpose for His people Israel. He had permitted them to go into captivity there for their chastisement. The Lord exercised His sovereignty and dominion over it, and gave it to Nebuchadnezzar, chosen among men.

This passage sheds no light upon Romans 13, for just before Daniel spoke these words, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego had refused to be in subjection to the king. They had their own power and had been cast into a furnace of fire. Some years later Daniel refused to bow to the civil authorities. He resisted their power and was cast into a den of lions.

Other expositors bring to bear upon this passage Paul's statements in 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life with all godliness and honesty."

One can accept and practice all that is taught here without believing that Romans 13 refers to civil authorities. We can pray for all men, for kings, and for all in authority. But, just when we pray for in relationship to them? Shall we pray that God will prosper them in their purposes and aspirations? Certainly not! The passage says we are to pray for them that they may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty under their rule. In fact the text here is contrary to the commonly accepted interpretation of Romans 13. There it said, "and they will praise you", here it says **"pray for them so that they will not trouble your purposes of doing good."**

The words of Peter in 1 Peter 2:13-17 need to be considered in connection with our text. There we read:

"Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be unto kings, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that ye may bring to silence the ignorance of

foolish men . . . Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."

This passage has a context and no honest teacher will ignore it or set it aside. First of all, this epistle was written to Jewish believers scattered throughout the provinces under Roman rule. They had fled from the persecutions of their own countrymen, sought refuge among the Gentiles, only to find these to turn persecutors because of Nero's edict. They are addressed as a chosen race, a royal priesthood and a separate nation. I Peter 2:9. No believer today can claim to be any of these things, if he understands the meaning of these terms.

Since Israel was first constituted a nation, one of the most difficult positions a people ever to face has been the position of the Jew among the Gentiles. Time brings no change in this, even today in every country the Jew belongs to a hated and despised minority, and he finds actual laws as well as human creations (the real meaning of Greek translated "ordinance") directed specifically against him because he is a Jew. Even in America I have seen numerous signs stating "Gentiles Only", a clear indication that Jews are not welcome. What is the Jew to do in view of all this? Shall he fight against it and resist it? No, he is told what to do in this portion.

He is to have his manner of life (conversation) honest among the Gentiles. Sad to say, the dispersed Jew among the Gentiles has signally failed to do this, and his dishonest practices have permitted the Gentile to justify their attitude toward him. If they had done this, even though they spoke evil against them, their words would not stand. They were to submit themselves to every human creation for the Lord's sake. They were not to resist or try to overcome the restraint placed upon them. In Romans 13 Paul says that the arrangement of God is not to be resisted. Here Peter says they are to submit to every human creation, whether it be from the king or from any authority under him. By doing good, they would put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

This passage does not set forth the Christian's duty toward his government. It does set forth the manner of life to be followed by the Jew while he is dispersed among the Gentiles.

The final passage to be considered is Titus 3:1.

"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready for every good work."

Beyond all question this passage does refer to civil authorities. I accept this as being laid upon me, and believe that it sets forth my duty to my government. However, this passage says "be subject" also says "be ready for every good work." Therefore, if the time ever comes when I must decide between "being subject" and doing that which I know to be wrong, I will no longer be subject. I will do what I know to be right. The language of this verse is such that it cannot be interpreted in the light of such passages as Acts 4:19 and Acts 5:29. The language of Romans 13:1 to 7 is set in such strong language that it cannot be interpreted in the light of an exception.

I will be and I am subject to sovereignties and authorities in government. This is my duty and it must be performed. Nevertheless I do not believe that these rulers are ordained of God. They are a terror to all evil works, that they are the ministers of God, or that they are avengers to punish evil doers. I do not believe that they have their authority from God, and

not believe in their divine right to rule. All these things are stated of certain powers in I 13, but they are not stated of civil authorities.

After carefully considering numerous commentaries on this passage, it seems that the reason for referring these statements to civil authorities is that there does not seem to be else to whom they can be applied. One expositor sums up his comments as follows:

"Since there are no spiritual authorities among men today to whom these words refer, in spite of the great difficulties created, we must apply them to civil authorities."

The author of those words stumbled upon the solution without recognizing it in his words "no spiritual authorities today." Is not this the key to the whole matter? Could it not be that there were spiritual authorities in the day when these words were written to whom they could be applied without alteration or change?

The moment such a suggestion is made, it will be rejected by those who refuse to recognize any difference between God's administration in the Acts period and God's administration in the present time. It will also be rejected by those who see no difference between the Church of God of the Acts period and the Church which is His body of the present time. But to all those who have seen clear distinctions in these things that differ, the problem of Romans 13 is simply one more solved the moment we obey God's command "rightly to divide the word of truth."

Dispensational Character of Romans

It must not be forgotten that the passage under consideration is a part of the book of Romans and that it was written in the Acts period. Chronologically it should be placed at about the time that Romans reveals the gospel of the grace of God, a gospel that Paul takes and joins to the revelation in Ephesians. But its dispensational character comes from the Acts period when certain great truths prevailed that do not prevail now. They were in effect then, but they are not in effect now.

In Romans 1:16 it is stated that the gospel is to the Jew first. That is not true now. In Ephesians 3:6-7 we find that the Gentile is a joint-partaker of the gospel.

The Jew no longer has any advantage, and there is no profit in circumcision. This was set forth in Romans 3:1-2, but it is not true now. When the "salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles" the Jew lost every advantage he had ever enjoyed.

There is no "remnant" now as set forth in Romans 11:5. If God calls and saves one of Jewish nature is a Jew, he is cut off from all that he ever was or ever could have been as a Jew.

The Gentile who is saved today is not grafted into Israel's good olive tree as stated in Romans 11:17-24.

We are not debtors to Israel for a single spiritual blessing that we possess. We have not made partakers of their spiritual things. Our blessings are all in grace, and grace cannot be repaid. The truth set forth in Romans 15:27 is not truth for today.

These things set forth the dispensational character of the Roman epistle, and it only confusion when we try to carry them over beyond the dispensational dividing line of Acts. Even so it is with the truth in the thirteenth chapter. The explicit statements made there were altered, weakened, changed and restricted before they can be made to apply to civil authorities of today. But they can be allowed to speak forth with all the glory of a divine pronouncement when we apply them to the God-given spiritual authorities of the Acts period.

Spiritual Authorities

There had been God-given authority in the kingdom of Israel, and when this functioned according to the will of God, it brought peace and joy to the people. It was when "there was no king in Israel" and every man "did that which was right in his own eyes" that great confusion prevailed. On the day of Pentecost the true believers in Israel were publicly constituted forth as "the Israel of God" by the baptism in the Spirit. This was "the Church of God" for the Acts period and it was not without God-arranged and God-appointed authorities. When God announced His purpose to establish this believing remnant as the true Church, He said to Peter:

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. 16:19.

Stronger words were never spoken, and no greater authority was ever given to a human than that which was conferred upon Peter by these words. A key is a badge of power and authority, and these words set forth that Peter (the twelve also, Matt. 18:18) was established with superior authority. His acts upon earth were ratified in heaven. In John 20:22-23 this authority was extended even to the remitting and retaining of sin. Here indeed was the highest power and authority and it made those who possessed it superior authorities.

In Acts 3:6 we see Peter using his great authority to bring healing to a crippled man, in Acts 5 we see him wielding his authority to the extent that he pronounced a sentence of death upon Ananias and Sapphira. The sentence was executed at his word. He spoke and they followed. Truly he did not bear the sword in vain. He was God's minister to them for God knew those who did evil had good reason to be afraid. This one manifestation of the power that Peter wielded was so great that "no man dared join himself to them." Acts 5:13.

In Acts 8 we have the record of Peter pronouncing the death sentence against Simon the sorcerer. His words were, "You perish and your money perish." Acts 8:20. This sentence of death was held in abeyance while repentance was held out to Simon, who fully recognized that the words of Peter were not idle ones.

In Acts 13 we read of Paul using his authority upon Elymas the sorcerer, who hindered the work in the gospel. A sentence of actual blindness was pronounced upon him which could not pass even as Paul spoke the words. Acts 13:11.

As in the case of the miracles of Christ (John 20:30) many more such events as these may have occurred which have not been recorded in the Word of God. However, the superior authority

that was given to men in the Acts period is shown not only by events. It is set forth in plain statements. And it must be kept in mind that the "superior authorities" of the Acts were not just the apostles alone.

In Romans 12:8 Paul exhorts those who rule to do it with diligence. He instructs Thessalonians to know them who "are over you in the Lord (1 Thess. 5:12), and in 1 Cor 5 he gave specific instructions concerning the judgment of one who had erred.

When we read Romans 13:1-7 in the light of these positive truths it becomes very simple. The apostles and others of that time were the superior authorities to which every soul was subject. These men had their authority from God, and their offices had been arranged by God. They were not selected, elected or appointed by men. Their authority was the gift of God. If anyone resisted their power, he resisted God's arrangement, and such folly was sure to result in judgment. These authorities, with their power to bind and loose, were never a terror to good works, but to evil works.

If any complained of the power of the authorities (the words of Romans 13:3 would indicate that some did), they were instructed to do good and they would have no cause to fear. If they did good they could rest assured that they would receive praise. But if they did evil, they had cause to fear, for these men did not bear in vain the power to exact the most severe penalties. They were God's servants, avengers upon those who committed evil. Therefore, it was expected that they be obeyed, not only in order to escape punishment, but for the sake of conscience well. The God who gave them their great authority, gave them the wisdom needed to use it. They never abused their power.

It was because of these things that they were to pay taxes. The word tax means any penalty or burden imposed by authority. We who live in countries where church and state are separated have never known of any momentary burden being placed upon us except those imposed by the government. This causes us to think of taxes as being purely a civil matter, but this is not true. The authorities of the Acts period possessed every right to impose any levy that they desired upon any believer. This is seen in the words of Paul in I Corinthians 9:4-6. Paul and Barnabas were probably, the only ones who did not exercise their authority and demand their support. Paul insists that this was not because they lacked the power to do so.

One Lord

Just as the declaration one baptism set aside all but one of the baptisms that were God's, so in the Acts period, even so the words one Lord set aside every spiritual authority in relation to the Church which is His body except the Lord Jesus Christ. [Mr. Baker says of this statement "He says the words one Lord (Eph. 4:5) set aside every authority in relationship to the Church which is His body except the Lord Jesus Christ. (Strange that the apostles, prophets, etc., there in Eph. 4:11)." If Mr. Baker would make a practice of reading all contexts it would not lead him to avoid making such ridiculous statements. Those apostles in Eph. 4:11 were "perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." They were not for the work of ruling, and they had no power or authority to do so. This

reserved for the one Lord.]

The truth of one Lord is the central member of the seven great truths that form the unit spirit in Ephesians 4:4-5. In view of this no man today can claim one iota of God-given authority over another believer. To do so is to deny the truth of one Lord. To recognize the rule of Christ in the spiritual realm is to fail to give to Christ that which belongs to Him alone.

In the realm of government we must submit to the ruling powers. As believers we do not want to be citizens. We must submit to the civil order under which we find ourselves. We are not OUT of this world, but we are IN it, therefore, we must act accordingly.

No government ever will be perfect this side of the kingdom, and at times they may be oppressive, but as long as it does not involve our conscience God expects us to submit. If we do, we can depend upon His mercy to temper things for us so that they will be easier to bear. However, in the realm of things spiritual we yield authority to no one but the Lord Jesus Christ.

It would be well indeed for every believer who has entered into an understanding of his position as a member of the Church which is His body to settle once and for all just who has authority over him, and to whom or what he is responsible. Some are insisting that the vague indefinite thing called "the assemblies of God's saints" has authority over us and that we are responsible. Others insist that it is to the "local assembly" that we are responsible; these have the right to administer something which is vaguely referred to as "scriptural discipline."

I can conceive of nothing that is further removed from the worthy walk of our calling than for one sinner who has been saved and called by God's grace to assume that he has been given authority over some other sinner that has been saved by God's grace. This denies in effect the great revelation of one Lord. It sets aside the seven-fold unity of the Spirit. The scriptural authorities of the Acts period were never given to the Church which is His body. No other authorities have been designated over us. Arguments and reasonings are meaningless. The revelation revealed for us says "One Lord." He is our authority. To Him we must be subject. We do not resist Him. His dealings with us are all in grace. His methods with us are gracious.

THE END - - SS32