



# Romans 13 Paraphrase

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## (Bilingual Greek English version)

Here is a paraphrase of Romans 12:21 – 13:10, based on the Greek original, which appears before each of the verses or sections paraphrased:<sup>1</sup>

### 12:21

Μὴ νικῶ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ  
ἀλλὰ νικά ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ κακόν.

Do not be conquered or overcome by what is bad, but conquer and overcome whatever is bad by doing what is good for you and everyone else in the way that God desires.

### 13:1

Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις  
ὑποτασσέσθω. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ  
θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὗσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμένα εἰσὶν.

Now if we apply this principle to the political situation (which has been quite a powder-keg for you all in recent years), it means this: Each one of you should submit yourselves entirely to the ruling authorities. For it is God herself who puts people in positions of authority and confers authority on them.<sup>2</sup> I am not saying, of course, that God has placed in power personally the authorities that are ruling right now (like this bloodthirsty lunatic Nero or his predecessor Claudius—precisely on whose account I am discussing these matters with you!). Rather, I am talking in general terms: in order to keep order in

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek text is taken from *The Greek New Testament*, 5th rev. ed., ed. Barbara Aland et al. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> On the use of the female pronouns used here and in the next verse, see my online article, “Inclusive God-Language,” on <https://94t.mx>.

the world, God has created positions of authority that must be filled. (God does not like anarchy because then everyone suffers.)

### 13:2

ὥστε ὁ ἀντιπασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ  
τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν,  
οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται.

Since it is God herself who has established societies in which certain people exercise authority over others in order to fulfill the purpose and function of preserving the peace (relatively speaking), to oppose those authorities by definition involves opposing that which God has decreed and ordained. And whoever persists in taking a stance in opposition to the authorities is really asking for trouble! You’re going to get punished in some way, and you may even be locked up or executed!

### 13:3

οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν  
φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ.

Therefore, those who rule over others are a source of fear, not to those who do good and observe the laws, but to the troublemakers and criminals. Obviously, of course, rulers often do really bad things even to the good people, but in general, at least if you are living by the rules, paying your taxes, fulfilling your civic duties, etc., etc., you can live as free from fear as is possible under these scoundrels.

θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν ·  
τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς ·

So if you want to live without constantly being afraid of what the authorities might do to you, then do what they consider to be good and lawful, like the things I just mentioned. In fact, by doing this, you will even turn the tables on them! Instead of *you* having to praise *them*, *they* will end up praising *you*! And if you get them to the point where they are praising you publicly and saying what a great person you are, you can be fairly certain that they are not suddenly going to turn around and do something bad to you or accuse you of something you didn't do. While you never know for sure, this is the best way to live without being consumed by fear.

### 13:4

θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν.

Because, believe it or not, God has actually given them to you for you to take advantage of them as your servants, as if they were your table waiters! So make use of them for your own benefit and well-being. God has put them into power out of love and concern for you. (They undoubtedly do not even realize this themselves!)

ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῆς, φοβοῦ ·  
οὐ γὰρ εἰκῆ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ ·  
θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἔκδικος  
εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι.

But if you're going to go around stirring up trouble and doing things that are against the law, you sure had *better* be afraid, because you will keep getting into problems with the authorities. I mean, what do you think they wield a sword for? To scratch their back? Don't you think they're going to use that sword against you if you're making trouble??? Duh!!!! For God has placed them in their role as servants precisely so that they can get rid of the troublemakers and impose

punishments on wrongdoers who arouse their wrath. In this way, God helps to prevent crime.

### 13:5

διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι,  
οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν  
ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν,

For that reason, it's not only important but necessary for you to be subject to whatever persons are in positions of authority, not just because you are afraid of what they might do to you if you provoke them to anger by your misbehavior, but also because consciously and conscientiously you realize that submitting to them is the best option and is in your own interest.

### 13:6

διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε ·  
λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσιν  
εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες.

Therefore (I repeat), by all means pay your taxes, because by doing so, you allow them to be ministers in God's service for the very purpose for which God put them in authority in the first place. By paying your taxes, you provide the authorities with the resources they need (although, as we all know, the rogues will skim quite a bit off the top!), and by your example you will also encourage others to submit to the authorities. In this way and others, you are contributing to an orderly society (not entirely orderly, of course, since things will always be a mess, but at least they will be less chaotic than they would otherwise).

### 13:7

ἀπόδοτε πᾶσι τὰς ὀφειλάς,  
τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον,  
τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος,

If you have any debts, try to pay them off as soon as you can. Otherwise, whether it's the crooks in the government or those in the private sector, they

will have you under the blade of their sword all the time and you will have to become their slave. Likewise, make sure everything is in order with the (Roman) Internal Revenue Service. Pay them whatever they want to charge you without making a fuss (unless it's just too much for you to handle, in which case you can try to appeal), because otherwise they're going to make life miserable for you and will end up taking everything you have and then some.

τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον,

Show them the respect that they demand from you as much as you can without betraying your faith so that they stay off your back. In fact, if they want to scare you along with everyone else, act like you're afraid of them so that they think they've accomplished their objective and will leave you alone. Because if you don't pretend that you're frightened, they will know that you have the guts to stand up to them, and then you're really in trouble!

τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν.

And when they say from atop their pedestal or horse, "Pay homage to me, knave!," then respond with as much enthusiasm as you can simulate, "Oh, yes! I honor Thee, O Great One!" But try not to let them see you laughing between your teeth when you do this or else they will realize it and will really be out to get you.

### 13:8

Μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε,  
εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν·

ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν.

Of course, the best thing is to stay completely out of debt if possible. Make every effort to be able to say, "I don't owe anything to anybody. I don't owe anyone my money or my time; and I don't owe the government any taxes. I am absolutely debt-free."

But to say that you don't owe anything to anybody can come across in the wrong way, as if you are bragging about your financial prowess or the fact that you are a "self-made man" (or woman). Imagine how that makes your poor sisters and brothers feel when, like most people, they have been driven so deeply into debt that they are trapped for life. From the perspective of God and Christ, you actually *are* in debt to your sisters and brothers, because you owe it to them to do whatever you can to help them out. That's what love is all about.

And if you love others in that way – not only your sisters and brothers in the faith but even people outside of your faith community –, it will be obvious to all that you are keeping and upholding the law, which by definition involves loving. That's a good thing in itself, besides the fact that you will avoid yourself lots of headaches.

### 13:9

τὸ γὰρ· Οὐ μοιχεύσεις, Οὐ φονεύσεις,  
Οὐ κλέψεις, Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις,  
καὶ εἴ τις ἕτερα ἐντολή,  
ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦτῳ ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται [ἐν τῷ]  
**Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν.**

Because the commandments God has given, such as: "Do not murder," "Do not cheat on your spouse," "Do not take what does not belong to you," and "Do not even *desire* to take what is not yours" – whether it be these divine commandments and recommendations or others – can be summed up in this way:

Love those around you just as much as you love yourself (neither more nor less!). And also, of course, as Jesus taught, love even those who are not close to you, such as those who are distant and even those who don't like you and want to do you harm. You love others, not by doing whatever they tell you to do, but by seeking their well-being and wholeness alongside your own in conformity with the will of God.

**13:10**

ἡ ἀγάπη τῷ πλησίον κακὸν οὐκ ἐργάζεται·  
πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη.

It is hardly even necessary for me to add that true love never seeks to do bad things to other people. Therefore, if you always try to live in love, you will be observing the law, whether this be God's law or a human law—at least in most cases, because sometimes rulers make inhumane laws that force people to do bad things and then justify those laws in God's name. Those scoundrels!

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