

## **Romans Chapters 10-13: Living Under the Power of God**

*From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Romans*

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. Those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1). Knowing that the systems of Rome’s rule were not in line with God’s justice, this counsel must have been hard for some in the Roman churches to hear. How could obeying the idolatrous, ruthless Roman empire be a way of living in the Spirit? Paul’s answer is that God is sovereign over every earthly authority and that God will deal with the authorities at the right time. Even Rome, powerful though it might have been, was ultimately subject to the power of God.

In the workplace, it is often true that “rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad” (Rom. 13:3). Bosses often organize work effectively and create a fair environment for ironing out disputes. Courts regularly settle cases involving patents, land titles, labor relations, and contracts equitably. Regulators often serve to protect the environment, prevent fraud, enforce workplace safety, and ensure equal access to housing opportunities. Police generally apprehend criminals and assist the innocent. The fact that even nonbelieving authorities so often get things right is a mark of God’s grace in the world.

But authorities in business, government, and every workplace can get things devastatingly wrong and sometimes abuse power for selfish ends. When this happens, it helps to distinguish between human-generated powers (even if they are significant) and the power of God that lies over, behind, and through all of creation. Often the human powers are so much closer to us that they can tend to block out our sense of God’s movement in our lives. This passage serves as an encouragement to discern where God is active and to join our lives to those activities of God that will foster true fullness of life for us and for all.

People who worked at Tyco International when Dennis Kozlowski was CEO must have wondered why he was allowed to get away with raiding the company’s coffers to pay for his own outrageous personal lifestyle. We can imagine that those who tried to work with integrity may have felt afraid for their jobs. Some otherwise ethical people may have succumbed to the pressure to participate in Kozlowski’s schemes. But eventually Kozlowski

was found out, charged, and convicted of grand larceny, conspiracy, and fraud. Those who trusted that justice would eventually be restored ended up on the right side of the story.

In every sphere of life, we have an ongoing responsibility to resist and to transform all unjust systems, always putting the common good above self-interest. Even so, we are to show respect to the authorities, whether at work, school, church, government, or civic life. We believe that change will occur not because we express outrage, but because God is sovereign over all.