




# The Disposition of Christians to Political Governance in Nigeria in Relation to Romans 12:14 - 13:10

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## Abstract

There have been controversies about Christians' disposition towards political leadership or civil authorities. The Apostle Paul (Romans 12:14-13:1-10) instructs Christians to submit to political authorities; given that certain Christians had shunned all restraint because of their heavenly calling and lost respect for earthly authorities. The burden of this study is the appropriate attitude required from adherents of Christianity towards unfair, ungodly, and despotic leaders. Christians are facing high-level of opposition and marginalization in Nigeria especially in recent times. For instance, most scholars usually treat Romans 13:1-10 thus neglecting Romans 12:14-21. Whereas Romans 12:14-21 is the preceding part of Romans 13:1-10. Therefore, the study employed a historical-critical reading of Romans 12:14-13:10 as a composite unit and its applicability to Christians' socio-political responsibilities in Nigeria. Primary data is elicited from the Bible with the aid of exegetical tools, while secondary data were sourced from works referencing the selected biblical text and on political governance in Nigeria. Data was content-analysed within the ambit of a phenomenological approach whereby attention is placed on Christians' disposition towards political leaders and civil authorities. Political obligation theory has been found appropriate and deployed for this study. Hence, the paper recommends that Christians should avoid contemptuous or indifferent disposition to civil authorities and political leaders. Christians occupying political offices should enliven their Christian virtues amidst persecution and repression.

**Keywords:** civil authorities, governance, Nigeria, Paul, Romans,

## Introduction

Governance is a very complex enterprise in any part of the world because it is characterised with multiple challenges that seem unsurmountable at times. S. O. Akintola (2019:85) rightly notes that "Apart from the challenge of corruption which has become endemic and had eaten deeper into the fabrics of the society, there is the religious factor which makes all decisions by any government in power to be evaluated with suspicion; hence, there is always an allegation of marginalisation by adherents of different religious bodies."

There has been controversial debate over Christians' disposition to political authorities. Evidence abounds in the Old Testament scripture which provide diverse experiences of political systems that made obedience very difficult and disturbing. Political leaders who tormented, molested, abused, exploited and enslaved their fellow citizens, eventually became tyrants, dictators, tormenters and persecutors. Examples include Pharaohs of Egypt (Exodus 1:8, 5) Ahab (1 Kings 21), Rehoboam (1 Kings 1:26), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:5; 8:23-25), Antiochus IV of Syria. In the New Testament political tyrants include Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1, 16), Herod Antipas (Luke 13:31; Mark. 8:15; Matthew. 14:1-12; Luke. 23:7-15; Acts 4: 27).

George Celestin (1969) notes that "dissatisfaction of the underprivileged around the globe threatens sudden and violent social and political action, and Christians are finally waking up to the implication of the situations." Similarly, in the Buhari's regime (2015-2023) and the



Muslim-Muslim ticket of Bola Tinubu (President) and Shetima (Vice-President) as the flagbearers of All People's Congress (APC), Christians in Nigeria are undergoing unprecedented marginalization and persecution than any political era in history. Strategic political office holders are predominantly non-Christians. The head of the executive (the President), the head of legislature (the Senate President), and the head of the Judiciary (the chief Justice of Nigeria) are all Muslims. This imbalance is unprecedented. The next layer of government, which is the military and security services; the heads of the Ministry of Defence, Army, Navy, Police, National Security Adviser, Director of Military Intelligence, EFCC, DSS, Defence Intelligence Agency, The Nigerian Correctional Service, Nigeria Customs Service, Nigeria Immigration Service, National Intelligence Agency, are all northern Muslims. In reaction this situation, The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) has condemned what they called the glaring marginalization of Christians in appointments into Federal Government offices by the Buhari-led administration. The PFN National President notes that "...Nigeria had never been as divided the way it is now under the present Buhari administration" (Ayodele, 2021).

There have been cases of alleged "religious blasphemy" where Christians have been brutally killed. On 12th May 2022, a female student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto State was murdered because certain individuals claimed she abused Prophet Muhammad. Another very ugly event was the public execution of Reverend Lawan Andimi and Daciya Dalep, a student of University of Maiduguri. Before then there have been outcry from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) that the insurgents' tactics have been targeting Christians and their worship centres. Reverend Lawan Andimi was abducted by Boko Haram insurgent group on 14 January 2020 and they demanded for a ransom of N800, 000, 000 and they went ahead and beheaded the 58-year-old clergyman even after CAN leadership offered to pay N50,000,000. Furthermore, Christian leaders have become the target of kidnappers in Nigeria because of money or persecution.

The Northern Elders Forum, a social-political group comprising eminent personalities who hail from northern Nigeria, condemned the killing of Christians despite majority of these individuals are Muslims. The convener of the meeting states that "The current government led by President Muhammadu Buhari has failed to secure the citizens from incessant attacks by bandits and terrorist groups." The group condemned the insurgents' tactics of targeting Christians and publicising their executions. However, they appealed to religious leaders not to succumb to the insurgents' efforts to incite religious groups against each other (Channels TV, 2020).

The issues raised above, marginalization of Christians into Federal Government offices and the killings and attacks targeted at Christians and churches, are capable to fuelling hostility and rebellion against government authorities in Nigeria. Christians are bound to neglect their social and political responsibilities. They may choose to evade tax payment, organise protests, neglect their statutory duties and the like. And what appears to be the last straw that broke the camel's back is the feeding of Muslim-Muslim ticket by All Progressive Party (APC). The ruling party, All Progressive Party, decided to present Muslims for the posts of President and Vice President for the 2023 general elections as if they cannot find any capable Christians. The usual practice in Nigeria's political process have been Christian/Muslim or vice-versa especially for the posts of President/Vice President or Governor/Deputy Governor. This act is widening the religious, ethnic and socio-political gulf amongst Nigerians.

This study has reviewed relevant literatures and made attempt to provide explanations to the following questions: What is the hermeneutic interpretation of Romans 12:14-13:10? What is the implication of reading Romans 13:1-7 in isolation? How does Paul's admonition in Romans 12:14-13:10 shape our perspective about governance in the public and political space? How does this pericope influence Christians' disposition towards political governance and civic responsibilities in Nigerian society?



Political obligation theory has been found appropriate for this study, it is like inserting round peg in the round hole. Political obligation refers to a moral duty to obey one's country or state. It may require defending or fighting for one's nation especially during war. The phrase "political obligation" is traceable to T. H. Green (1986) who purposed to address the problem of discovering "the true ground or justification for obedience to law." Earlier, Sophocles raised the same problem in his play "Antigone" first performed circa 440 BCE, and Plato's "Crito" recounts Socrates' philosophical response to the problem, in the face of his own death, some forty years later (Dagger & Lefkowitz, 2022).

Dagger and Lefkowitz (2022) state that theories of political obligation is divided into five categories: consent, gratitude, fair play, association, and natural duty. The consent category states that one has obligations because you consented to them. One agreed to obey the law and support the state by some statement or action they took. This theory was John Locke's preferred method and it is the most obvious. Gratitude theory takes the idea, that those who have given us something, who have sacrificed for us, are owed something in return, and uses it to justify political obligation. Fair play depends on people "accepting" benefits instead of merely "receiving them (Powell, 2022). The Associative category refers to agents who are alleged to have merely in virtue of their occupying a role in socially salient relationship, such as a parent, friend, sibling or a doctor. These roles are partly constituted by the various obligations their occupants owe to the other(s) in the relationship (Dagger & Lefkowitz, 2022). In the last category, natural duties are considered to be ones people have simply in virtue of their status as moral agents. They do not have to do anything to acquire them. It is understood that everyone is subject to a natural duty of justice that "requires us to support and comply with just institutions that exist and apply to us" (Rawls, 1999).

Throughout history, there is a general notion that political society and its rules have divine backing and that keeps people away from thinking that there may be justification for disobedience. During Jesus' earthly ministry, he drew distinction between tribute owed to Caesar and that owed to God (Matt 22: 15-22) which implies that what the rulers command may contradict God's stipulations. This ideology became obvious when the rulers tried to suppress Christianity (e.g. persecution of Christians, emperor worship and the like).

Nevertheless, Christian tradition held that there is an obligation to obey the law grounded in divine command, with the most important text being Romans 13:1-2. As a theory of political obligation, divine command presents two general problems. First, it presupposes the existence of divinity and second, the commands of the divine being(s) are not always clear. It is one thing to know that we should give to Caesar and what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. But it is quite another thing to know what exactly what is Caesar's dues. The challenge that is staring Christians in their faces in Nigeria is the reconciliation (probably navigation) of Romans 13:1-2 with the uncomfortable fact that rulers are often hostile to Christianity like the present reality in the nation (Dagger & Lefkowitz, 2022). This forms the central question that this study seeks to address.

### **Political Governance in the First Century vis-à-vis Paul's Society**

At the inception of Christianity, Rome was undergoing a riotous revolution in its constitution from republican order to the rule of autocracy. The political environment of the first century was not consistent but reflects many transitions in power and the general fluidity of Roman policy and society (Johnson, 1997:365). The Jews have been under a pagan superpower from the time of Old Testament through the New Testament times. In the first century CE (New Testament era), Rome was militarily powerful, culturally vibrant, rich and pagan. The Romans did not have intention to suppress Judaism but the culture and lifestyle of the master race permeated Palestine and many of the wealthy and influential people adapted to the Greco-Roman way of life (Wenham & Walton, 2011:21).

Tax payment was one of the enduring legacies of the Roman imperial control over Palestine. There were several taxes for example, the *tributum soli*, was prosperity tax on land, houses,



slaves, and ships within each province. The poll tax or head tax was on men from fourteen to sixty-five years old and women from twelve to sixty-five years. There were religious taxes, which were peculiar to the Jews. These were the half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) shekel temple tax, tithes, and firstling taxes. Jesus Christ paid the temple tax (Matt 17:24-27). While the Romans taxes were paid in Roman coins called denarii, only the Jewish shekel was used for the temple tax. Census exercises were conducted periodically for the purpose of determining tax population and officials were appointed to collect taxes (Gwamna, 2014:233).

Rops (1980:75) alleges that:

The taxes did infuriate the Jews. It was not that they were heavier than in other provinces, subject to imperial tribute: the taxes, direct and indirect, were more or less the same everywhere; and everywhere they were collected by the same very bad system, that of tax farmers, the notorious 'politicians of the Gospel, who made fortunes upon the back of tax payers. But the Jews were off for the *fiscus*, the imperial treasury, and even more so because most of these state taxes had parallel religious taxes for the temple and the priests, and doubled burden was overwhelming.

Furthermore, Rops (1980:75) notes that the census exercise was another vexation for the Jews who conceived it to be extraordinarily unpleasant mark of their subjection as, "they were numbered like beasts in a market." Tacitus admits that taxes in the province of Judaea were heavy load (Stagemann, 1995:119).

### **First Century Christians' Political Disposition Towards First Century Roman Governance**

Most of the biases of Easterners towards Rome came through Roman or pro-Roman lenses. Based on his consideration of the natural traits of the Romans, Polybius, a Greek historian concluded that Rome was destined to become a superpower and tailored his history to demonstrate how it happened. Also, Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, coordinated a Galilean army against Rome in the Jewish revolt 67 CE, but wrote his historical works after he had surrendered, when he had become pro-Roman and even acquired Roman citizenship. People in such social mode did not perceive horror in Roman domination. There were other Greek writers who were hostile to Roman government but their literary exhibitions are piece-meal.

The New Testament writings provide provincial attitudes toward Roman governance, since they convey attitudes of the non-elite. Thomson (2000:967) points out that the first five books of the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts, showcase an uneasy peace: Jews despised the tax collectors and only grudgingly give to Caesar; some could respect the piety of a centurion (Luke 7:1-5; Acts 10:1-2), yet many eagerly await a new, independent Jewish state (Acts 1:6); life continues rather peaceably, but provocation by Rome (Luke 13:1) or by Jewish nationalists (the *sicarii* of Acts 21:38) is never far away, and it is thought plausible that the next confrontation might cause Rome to "take away our temple and our nationhood" (John. 11:48).

From a calendrical calculation, Rome was the governing authorities that the Apostle Paul referred to in Romans 13:1-3. There are concerns over Paul's instruction to Christ-followers for submission to Roman authorities. Responding to such concerns, G. A. McLaughlin notes that in Paul's day, though the government was corrupt, the basis of the law was good and was better than anarchy (MacLaughlin, 1967:232). Furthermore, Hodge (1972:405) provides the basis for Paul's imperative in this manner:

There was peculiar necessity during the apostolic age for inculcating the duty of obedience to civil magistrates. This necessity arose in part from the fact that a large portion of converts to Christianity had been Jews and were particularly indisposed to submit to the heathen authorities. This indisposition arose from the prevailing impression among them, that this





subjection was unlawful, or at least highly derogatory to their character as the people of God, who had so long lived under a theocracy.

Reason for such hostile disposition is traceable to Deuteronomy 17: 15 which states that “be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite”. In addition, Barclay (1975:173) has given other reasons:

The Jews were notoriously rebellious. Palestine, especially Galilee, was constantly seething with insurrection. Above all, there were the Zealots. They were convinced that there was no king for the Jews but God, and that no tribute must be paid to anyone except to God. Nor were they content with anything like a passive resistance. They believed that God would not be helping them unless they embarked on violent action to help themselves. Their aim was to make any civil government impossible. They were known as dagger-bearers. They were fanatical nationalists sworn to terrorist methods. In this, Paul saw no point at all.

Such notion was carried on to the flowering period of early Christianity. Briscoe (1982:236) adds that, “perhaps the major difficulty that Christians encountered was related to the dilemma that faced them when the divinely appointed government acted in ways that directly contravened the law.”

### **Exegesis of Romans 12: 14-13:10**

Chapter division in our Bibles at times get people miss the point in this *pericope*, Romans 12: 14-13. The chapter break in 13:1 prevents good reading of the passage because it runs from 12:14 through 13:10. The epistle to the Romans is one of the proto-Pauline books, that is, there have not been controversies over its authorship. The epistle to the Romans is the greatest and most influential of all the epistles written by Apostle Paul. Of all Paul’s writings, epistle to the Romans is the most systematic and logical doctrinal book (Utley, 2022). It is most important as being the first well-developed theological statement by a Christian theologian which has come down to us, and one which has incalculable influence on the framing of Christian theology ever since—arguably the single most important work of Christian theology ever written (Dunn, 1993:838). In the history of the church, lives have been radically transformed through the impact of epistle of Paul to the Romans.<sup>1</sup>

Paul’s argument in Romans 12: 14-13:10 is premised on the fact that the Christian life, *Christoformity*, expressed in the church space should filter its way out into their relationships and orientation toward the Roman Empire. Christoformity, according to McKnight (2019:27-28), is the process of being conformed to Christ. “Christ is the paradigm, the *eikon* (image) of God, the fundamental revelation of who God is, and this God-in-Christ revelation is one who because he was God chose not to stay put but entered missionally into being a human even to the degrading status of one crucified.” Christoformity is a significant theme in Romans. Taking on a Christoform identity is the aim of Paul’s letter to the Romans, and it takes on three separable themes: a God orientation, a Body-of-Christ orientation, and a public orientation (McKnight, 2019:27).

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, in 386 AD, read Romans 13:13-14 and attested that “No further would I read, nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away” (Confessions, vii. 29, 2007 by William E. Wenstrom, Jr. Bible Ministries). Likewise, Martin Luther testified that “This Epistle is the chief book of the New Testament, the purest gospel. It deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian, but to be subject of his meditation day by day, the daily bread of his soul... The more time one spends in it, the more precious it becomes and the better it appears. He spoke of it as ‘a light and way into the whole Scriptures.’” David N. Steele & Curtis C. Thomas, *Romans: An Interpretive Outline* (Philadelphia, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963), 1.



Ignoring the distinctive Christian ethic in Romans 12:14-21 and Romans 13:8-10 is like cutting off the head and legs of an individual. On the literary context of the chosen text, Romans 12:3-8 and 12:9-13 spell out how believers in Christ ought to relate with one another, while in Romans 12:14, Apostle Paul shifts to how Christians in Rome were to relate to non-Christians and that extends to Romans 13:10. So the famous passage on church and state, Romans 13:1-7 is framed in the middle of a discussion of how Christians ought to relate to outsiders in a distinctively Christian ethical framework. According to McKnight (2019:46-47) it runs in this manner: beginning (bless, empathise, seek peace—12:14-21); middle (be subject to governing authorities—13:1-7); end (love your neighbour—13:8-10).

**Romans 12:14-21.** The Christoform life practiced among the believers in the Body of Christ should translate to public life, specifically their disposition toward the Roman Empire. Verse 14 states the attitude that Christ-followers should have toward those who persecute and oppress them. The admonition to “bless” εὐλογεῖτε pops up twice and contrasted with “do not curse” (μὴ καταρᾶσθε). This is a re-echo of Jesus’ imperative to love one’s enemies and pray for those who persecute (Matt 5:44, Luke 6: 27-28). The injunction to bless our persecutors is one of the most counter-cultural and revolutionary New Testaments imperatives and can only be implemented by the impulse of the Holy Spirit. In verse 15, the infinitives to rejoice (χαίρειν) and to weep (κλαίειν) have an imperatival sense. Weeping means sorrow, pain, and grief of heart. It is much easier to rejoice than mourn. One should not be glad at the calamities of others (see. Prov 17:5) Rejoicing with those who are rejoicing and weeping with those who are weeping are not only concrete proofs of love in the Christian community but penetration in the public life with evangelistic and transformative consequences (Schreiner 1998:729). Christians must identify themselves with the needs of others. Verse 16 states that they should “live in harmony with one another” and this is different from being “the same mind with one another” (15:5). The former emphasizes living in peace with others as contained in verse 18. Three behaviours can rupture harmonious living with others such as pride, unwilling attitude to associate with people of low social status and self-conceit. In verse 17, vengeance is prohibited. Stoics and some philosophers urged non-resistance because they emphasised that the only thing truly controlled anyway was one’s own self. Some Jewish sages emphasised non-resistance (Lev 19:18, Prov 20:22) because one should depend on God’s vindication alone (Prov. 20:22). Paul charges the believers in Rome to live at peace with everyone. In the ancient times, many people valued honouring custom especially the minorities such as the diaspora Jews in Gentile world. They were often careful to honour society’s ethical laws provided these laws did not violate their own beliefs (NIV Study Bible 2016:1970).

**Romans 13:1.** Paul begins his argument for submission to governing authorities by establishing the rulers’ *ethos* (v. 3). Governing authorities are given their authority by God and are appointed by Him (Capes, Reeves & Richards, 2017:25-27). This is Paul’s very blunt thesis from which verses 2-7 will build. Some translations (e.g. KJV) translate “every soul” rather than “every person” (e.g. NASB). Though “soul” is the literal word used by Paul (ψυχὴ), Bullinger points out that this is a synecdoche of the part, in which the part is put for the whole (Bullinger, 1968:640). Therefore, “soul” is justly translated “person.” This one, this person, is to be in submission to governing authorities. Also, as Barth (1933:481) writes, to be in submission “means to withdraw and make way; it means to have no resentment, and not to overthrow.” Yoder (2000:198) concurs: “It recognizes whatever power exists and accepts whatever structure of sovereignty happens to prevail.”

Throughout the ages, the number one interpretive question of Romans 13:1 surrounds the definition of “governing authorities.” Fitzmyer (1993: 666) provides a good summary:

In medieval and Renaissance times commentators were divided over whether Paul was referring solely to civil rulers. Cajetan, Seripando, Melancthon, and Calvin understood the phrase to refer to civil



magistrates, whereas Sadoletto and Luther understood it as 'spiritual rulers' and 'secular princes.'... This distinction rarely surfaces in the modern discussion of the text. However, Cullmann has maintained that *exousiai* denotes the 'invisible angelic powers that stand behind state government,' or even with a double meaning, 'the empirical state and the angelic powers.' He compares 1 Cor. 2:8; 15:24; 1 Pet 3:22; Col 1:16; 2:10, 15; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12, where it seems from the context that *exousia* could have such a meaning. A form of this interpretation was proposed earlier, apparently first by Dibelius, but he later abandoned it. It was then used by Karl Barth, Den, and Schmidt, before Cullman made it popular.

Modern scholars widely reject Oscar Cullmann's theory of angelic powers being referenced here by Paul. The three most common counterarguments to Cullman are: (1) the paying of taxes in verse 6 implies human authorities, (2) Paul holds that angels will be judged by Christians in 1 Corinthians 6:3 and (3) the parallel of this passage, 1 Peter 2:13-14, has no hints of angelic powers (Ladd, 1974:477).

**Romans 13:2** In verse 2 Paul furthers his thesis by showing that those who resist these authorities by not staying within the confines of their sociological roles are bound for judgment. This judgment could be the eschatological judgment of God and/or His wrath expressed on Earth through His earthly authorities (v. 4). The resistance of which Paul writes is not a single instance of disobedience; rather Paul is warning against social anarchy and the persistent, willing ignorance of social status (Dunn, 1993:762-763). Opposing authorities is opposing God since He is the one that established them (Wright, 2005:70). If Paul's purpose was to discourage Christians from joining hostile Jews against the government, this is a powerful argument against it. It should be realized, however, that Paul is not justifying obedience to ungodly edicts (though he is justifying obedience to ungodly rulers, as most rulers of the day were indeed pagans). Surely Paul would side with Peter in Acts 5:29, along with Daniel and his three friends (see Daniel 1, 3, and 6), that obedience to God trumps obedience to secular authorities.

**Romans 13:3** It is noteworthy that a parallel to this passage is found in 1 Peter 3:13. Here Paul uses diatribe and answers a supposed question of his imaginary interlocutor (a rhetorical technique used by Paul elsewhere in the letter, see 3:1-8). What must one do in relation to these authorities in order to obey the ordinance of God (v. 2)? He or she must do good and thereby avoid fear of authority. Rather than inducing fear, this doing of what is right will bring praise from authority. Praise as used here is not a reward in the sense of compensation for meritorious works. Rather, praise here is used in the sense of valuable "social approval" or "honour." In other words, "the praise could be expressed by saying that good behaviour secures good standing in the state, a status to be cherished and cultivated" (Murray, 1965:151). Gaining this higher social status is in direct opposition with fear of the authorities. Ironically, Paul had a form of this social approval in that he was a Roman citizen (see Acts 22:25-28), and yet he was beaten and imprisoned by these authorities (which would naturally induce some psychological level of fear). One might conclude, then, that doing bad invokes fear of authority, which leads to social rejection. It should be noted here that the function of these governing authorities was to maintain public order and suppress any opposition to empirical power; rulers were established by God to ensure peace. Thus it has been rightly said, "in that respect the Christian should instinctively view the government not as an enemy but as an ally and helper towards his own moral endeavours" (Bruce & Allen, 1979:1340).

**Romans 13:4** The peace that rulers achieve is not just for the imperial rulers but for the subjects as well. Paul makes known to his audience that this peace is for "your good" here in Romans 13:4. Bringing common good is the goal of civil authorities. Therefore, it is the authority's right, under God, to bear the sword, that is, to punish, even to the point of death. Those that are liable to receive the sword are those that rebel against the common good and disturb the *Pax Romana*. As "a minister of God," the punishment of civil authority is therefore



divine wrath. God has given the role of punishment and keeping order to the rulers, thus vengeance by the citizen/subject is not justified (see 12:19). There is no such thing as just rebellion. As Wright (2002:721) nicely phrases it, “[punitive justice, or wrath,] is the point at which the authority *must do* and what the individual *may not do*” (Italics original).

**Romans 13:5** With Paul insisting that one shall obey the divinely established hierarchy of authority,<sup>2</sup> resistance to disobey should not only spur from fear of wrath (v. 4, *sword*) but also from one’s conscience.<sup>3</sup> More than just fear, one submits to rulers out of obligation to God, as God is the Lord of conscience. Disobedience to God’s established order should disturb the heart of God-fearers; thus conscience serves as a guide to positive moral and spiritual behaviour. However, it is worthy to note that Paul does not find persuasion via the conscience to be a distinctive Christian reality. Dunn (1993:765-766) argues that Paul’s reasoning here is a psychological pragmatism (not theological exclusion). This finds support by looking at the history of *syneidēsis*. There is no Hebrew word of equivalence. It is well agreed upon that this noun is of Greek origin, but the earlier view that it was founded in a context of Stoic philosophy has been abandoned (Sakenfeld, 2006:721). The fact that the word is Hellenistic shows that non-Christians recognize a conscience as well.

**Romans 13:6** Verses 6 and 7 seem to be the climax of Romans 13:1-7. Paul has established the ethos and the rights of God’s established authority, now he brings in to focus what his audience must do in accordance with that knowledge (a miniature *pathos*). After declaring that everyone should submit for conscience’s sake, Paul goes on to say that it is because of *this* (conscience) that his readers pay taxes. There are two areas of interest in this verse: taxes and servants.

As mentioned earlier, the Roman historian Tacitus 56 CE – 120 CE noted heavy taxation in the middle to late 50s. Freedman (1992:337) offers a good historical analysis of the taxes referred to by Paul (to be further observed in v. 7):

After the conquest of Palestine in 63 B.C.E. by Pompey, Palestine was forced to pay tribute to Rome.... When Judea came under the Roman prefects in 6 C.E. (called procurators after 44 C.E.) the direct taxes, the ‘head’ or poll tax and the land tax were collected by officials in direct employ of the Romans.... In addition to the principal taxes, the personal or poll tax (*tributum capitis*) determined by the census (Luke 2:2; Matt 17:25; Acts 5:37) and the land tax [*tributum soli*], there were a host of indirect taxes, especially on the transport of goods. Jews were also subject to religious taxes such as the temple tax and tithes on produce for the Jerusalem priests. This double burden of taxation created considerable hardship and often precipitated both passive and violent resistance.

Jews particularly hated paying taxes since the coins they had to pay with bore an image of the emperor as well as a claim to his divinity (Bromiley, 1988:741) which was an affront to their faith. Furthermore, their taxes went to support the imperial cult, which was another ethical problem for the Jews. With the Jews being so resistant to payments, the Christians, who were still largely grouped with these Jews, would be watched closely by officials (Dunn, 1993:766). Therefore, it was necessary for Paul to incorporate this exhortation, not only because paying

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<sup>2</sup> Paul does not clearly define the details of this hierarchy, he only acknowledges its existence. He is concerned not with structure but with how the Christians live under it, and how Christians lived under the structure would inevitably impact it (Ladd, 575).

<sup>3</sup> For more New Testament usage of *συνείδησιν*, see Acts 24:16; I Cor. 8:12; 10:25-29; II Cor. 4:2; I Tim. 1:19; 4:2; Heb. 9:9, 14; 10:2; 13:18; 1 Pet. 2:19; 3:16. For other forms of “conscience” see Acts 23:1; Rom. 2:15; 9:1; I Cor. 8:7, 10; II Cor. 1:12; 5:11; I Tim. 1:5; 3:9; II Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:15 (Hendriksen, 436).





taxes is the right thing to do for conscience's sake, but also for the safety of Christians in avoiding the sword.

The etymology of "servant" (λειτουργοί) as used here in Romans 13:6 refers to one that works for the public good at his or her own expense (Bromiley, 1985:526-527). The term is composed of *laos*, "people," and *ergein*, "work for." In time, the word came to denote a "cultic minister," someone active in God's service (Fitzmyer, 1993:669). Paul calls tax collectors "ministers of God." Therefore, taxes could be regarded as the secular equivalent of the offerings and sacrifices brought to the altar; within God's ordered state, tax officials are the equivalent of priests within the cult" (Fitzmyer, 1993:772). This fits perfectly with Paul's consistent theme throughout the letter of breaking down ethnic barriers and redefining the people of God (Fitzmyer, 1993:759).

**Romans 13:7.** One should notice Paul's echoing of Jesus regarding a rendering of what is due (see. Mark 12:17), perhaps supporting Paul's familiarity with the pre-Pauline paradosis. Paul has already suggested that subjects support the government via taxes, as those that live under the general protection of the government are expected to support its finances. However, Paul moves beyond financial support and claims that ruling authorities are due fear/respect (φόβον) and honour (τιμῆν) as well. Interestingly, Paul is writing the letter with scars on his body from unjust treatment by Roman authorities, and yet he makes this statement. The point should be made, then, that even if one is unsatisfied with the ruling authorities, he or she is still obligated to hold judgment and obey Paul's exhortation in Romans 13:7 (Wright, 2002:721-722). Evil does not justify vengeance. Rather, Christians must conduct themselves in a manner parallel to the life of Jesus, that is, always in love and willing to live sacrificially. Jesus is the model of how one should act even in the midst of unjust authority, like Rome (Rom 12:9-21).

**Romans 13:8-10.** The focus of this unit dwells on love. Love is the central core of Pauline ethics. Paul's direct statements about the Roman Empire are preceded and followed by statements and emphasis on love. His statement in Romans 12:9 states that "love must be genuine" which means devoid of hypocritical tricks about loving one another and welcoming themselves to the table. Paul then says "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law... [all the commandments] are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law (13:8-10). With the view about the tension between the weak and the strong, the grounding test for all behaviours: "If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love" (14:15). And the source of this love is the Spirit (15:30). Thus, every action in the public should be geared towards loving one's neighbour.

As pointed out earlier, certain events happened on the Roman calendar which was remarkable to the Jews and Christians. In 49 CE, Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome over "Chrestus" (Christ) affair. The event of expulsion is mentioned in Acts 18:2 ("...because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome"). There are tendencies to think it bothered on conversion to Christianity occurring among Roman dignitaries. Another possible reason could be over the burden of taxes. Tacitus mentions that "there were persistent public complaints against the companies farming indirect taxes from the government." This means that these indirect taxes were on goods entering and leaving Rome. In sum, when Paul admonishes Christ-followers in Rome to pay taxes (Rom 13:6-7), he probably was addressing this irritation of taxation. There were tempting tendencies to revolt or protest.

### **Romans 12:14 - 13:10 and Christians' Disposition to Political Governance in Nigeria**

Having examined Romans 12:14-13:10, this study puts forward is that hostile or capricious rulers must be endured, for God must have given them opportunity of power as an indication of His displeasure with a wicked people. In Romans 13:1 it is evident that God is the source of every government whether godly or ungodly. By implication, failure to submit to their



leadership is tantamount to against God. Also, it becomes chaotic or even anarchical if the citizens in any nation failed to obey civil authorities or refused to fulfil their monetary obligation especially in terms of payment of tax (Rom. 13:6). Christians are urged to pay their dues as required by the law such as driver's license, vehicle or motorcycle registration, toll gate fee and the like.

Notionally, civic duty is a natural and imperative obligation of the individual member of the state. This is so because man is a social being and more significantly in a web of interconnection. Every citizen of the state has the right to exercise their obligation in a responsible and ethically justified manner. This includes the corresponding duties that make the building of the society possible and feasible. Arinze rightly opines "...Christians should be model citizens and patriots (Arinze, 1990:15). Christians should always set the pace and tune of development in this nation because of their exposure to religious and spiritual wisdom. It is sacrosanct and obligation bound in conscience for Christians to participate in all the activities that foster and ensure the realization of the common good.

Christians occupying political positions should bear in mind that God is the source of their authority and he requires quality service delivery and justice. Because of their Christian mandate, they required to function as salt of the earth and light in the world (Matt 5:13-14). They should not join multitude of corrupt politicians and civil servants who siphon the nation's treasury for personal aggrandizement. Government officials should not sacrifice dutifulness for personal pleasure or religious gratification.

Obviously, there are antagonists of Christianity and Christians in Nigeria. These foes deliberately oppose Christian cause in this nation. Apostle Paul's charge is "Do not repay evil for evil" (Rom. 12:17). The preferred goal is to turn an enemy to a friend. Love conquers hatred (Rom. 13:8-10). Sympathy rendered by Christians to unbelievers may prompt their foes to become friends (Rom. 12:15). When unbelievers are bereaved or undergoing difficulties, Christians have the obligation to sympathise and pray for them.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the study above, it is imperative to draw some recommendations and that include the following:

1. Church leaders and Christians are encouraged to pay taxes whether personal or corporate. Church leaders should not hide under "clergy stickers" on their vehicles in order to evade tax. Regardless of the religious persuasion of people in authority. Nigeria needs people's taxes to run the nation. Citizens are duty-bound to pay taxes. Good governance is expensive thus the government needs internally generated revenues to cater for her obligations.
2. Church leaders should mobilize their parishioners who are civil or public servants to be dutiful. They do not need to entertain fear. Indolence is not a Christian virtue. Government workers should consider their service as unto to the Lord Jesus Christ and not human authorities. The best service is the one rendered for the common good. Absenteeism and late coming to duty posts are the order of the day and some Christians are guilty.
3. Christians are encouraged to be involved in political processes at all levels. Talking about marginalization of Christians in Nigerian political space is not enough, if Christians are running away from politics then the worst of men will govern them. Christians should be involved in elections
4. Christians are enjoined to shine their light of good actions and patriotic services. Non-Christians can be won for Christ if Christians are sympathetic, hospitable, resilient and Christ-like in their dealings. Even when Christians are persecuted they should be discouraged of serving their nation. Authorities such as security operatives should be respected and honoured.



5. The Government should promote fairness and equity. Failure to provide political space for people and create a “sense of belonging” phenomenon in order to avoid insurrection and rebellion.

## Conclusion

This study has identified the implication of reading Romans 13:1-7 in isolation without including the preceding and the texts that followed namely Romans 12:14-21 and Romans 13:8-10. Paul appeals to Christians in Rome that if one lives an upright life and prays for and obeys the government, one does not need to fear anything (Rom 13:1-4). Similarly, Christians in Nigeria should avoid elements of hostility, tax evasion, violent protests, vengeance or *Nigerphobia* (hatred of Nigeria). Christians must shun every tendency to repay evil with evil—vendetta exhibition. Marginalisation, discrimination, oppression and even death should not mar or kill our love and passion for Christ and our shared values. Paul’s admonition in Romans 13:1-7 should propel followers of Christ to showcase their social and civic responsibilities. Christian faith is not an excuse or a license to be anti-government or rebellious. As light of the world and salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-16), it is sacrosanct for Christians to be pace-setters in good works and stand against corruption in every space where it raises its head.

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