

Week of July 1-7

## R.E.S.P.E.C.T

**Scripture Reading:** Read Romans chapter 13

Most folks over forty are, no doubt, familiar with Aretha Franklin's signature song, "Respect." Although the song has some suggestive elements to it, there is one line that speaks to a desire almost all humans have: *"Yes, respect, all I need is respect."* Unfortunately, many folks don't feel that they are respected. They feel more like the late Rodney Dangerfield, a comedian who would regularly include the theme of "No respect, no respect at all... that's the story of my life" in his monologues. Everyone wants respect but only a precious few feel like they are really respected.

In our chapter reading today, the apostle Paul takes a look at the theme of respect; but he does it from a different angle: *"Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."* Notice, rather than focusing on **getting** respect, Paul challenges the Roman believers to focus their attention on **giving** it instead. Paul turns the tables on our need and desire to be respected. He wants us instead to focus on respecting others, and, in light of the context that precedes these commands, particularly those in authority over us.

According to Paul in the opening verses of Romans 13, God is the ultimate authority over all and He has instituted human authority on earth. These human authorities are there because God has delegated to them his authority to rule in his place. When we respect and submit to human authority, then, we are really respecting and submitting to God's authority. Such respect opens us to all kinds of blessings according to the Bible: freedom from fear of authority, protection, a clear conscience, enhancing one's witness for Christ, encouraging authority and an enlargement of our own authority. Conversely, when we dishonor and rebel against human authority, we are, in actuality, disrespecting and rebelling against God's authority. Such disrespect carries with it terrible consequences: judgment from human and divine authority, a defiled conscience, marring of one's witness, grieving of authority and opening a door to demonic oppression.

Sadly, we live in a day where disrespect of authority, particularly governmental authority, is rampant. Talk shows, newspapers, television shows, etc. are filled with people and commentaries that dishonor those in political office. Rather than challenging ideas and policies (a privilege & responsibility that is ours as citizens in a free and democratic society), folks are attacking and impugning the very personhood of people with whom they disagree. It would be tragic enough if this only took place in the world of unbelievers. Unfortunately, the church has too often fallen prey to the same disrespectful attitude when they disagree with the stance of a particular political party or candidate. It makes me wonder what would happen if we spent as much time praying for those in authority over us as we do complaining and putting them down. Just a thought to ponder in this presidential election year!

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** How much respect have you given those in authority with whom you disagree? Read 1 Tim 2:1-4 and put it into practice today in your prayer time.

**Take-a-way:** *To respect authority is to honor the One who has given the authority.*