

Questions on Furnish: “Christians and the Governing Authorities”

The questions in this file are based on chapter 5 of Victor Paul Furnish’s, *The Moral Teaching of Paul*.¹ Use them to guide your reading and review.

1. What is the location in the letter to the Romans of the passage usually taken to be Paul’s most direct treatment of the issue of the Christian’s relation to the governing authorities? What chapter and verses? (115–117)
2. State as clearly as you can the general principle that Paul follows in other letters when dealing with issues of the Christian’s relationship to “the state.” What three passages does Furnish cite to illustrate this general principle? (page 116)
3. In the 1960s many white Christians cited Paul’s argument in Romans in order to condemn the work of Martin Luther King, Jr., who violated some laws that he called “unjust laws” in order to fight for the liberation of black Americans. In the 1800s whites used these same verses from the letter to the Romans to tell slaves they had no right to rebel against their masters. Furnish cites two other abusive uses of Paul’s comments on the ruling authorities in the letter to the Romans. What two examples does Furnish cite? (page 117)
4. On pages 118–122 Furnish presents a concise discussion of the history of the Jewish people in the Greco-Roman world. Summarize the portion of that discussion covering the period from Antiochus III to Pontius Pilate. (pages 118–119)
5. Who was Judas the Galilean, and why is he important for understanding the issue of one’s relationship to the government? (page 119)
6. What happened in 66 CE in Jerusalem, and how is it related to the issue of paying taxes? How did the Romans respond? What did the Roman army do in 70 CE under the general Titus? These events happened after Paul’s death, so how are they relevant to understanding Romans 13:1–7?
7. Furnish spends two pages (120–121) discussing issues that show that not all Jews agreed with the Zealots. He begins this discussion with a brief survey of relevant Jewish literature. What literature does he cite? (page 120)
8. Who were the Essenes, and why are they relevant to the topic of relationship to the governing authorities? (120-121)

¹ Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), pages 115–139.

9. What did Philo of Alexandria do when Paul was a young man that can help us understand the context of Romans 13:1—7? (121—122)
10. What happened in 64 CE that is relevant to the relationship between Christians and the governing authorities? (page 122)
11. When did Paul write the letter to the Romans according to Furnish? Why is knowing that date relevant to understanding Romans 13:1—7? (page 122)
12. Briefly describe the literary structure of chapters twelve through thirteen of the letter to the Romans. Furnish identifies four subsections of this part of the letter, an introduction, two main sections, and a conclusion. Where are those subsections located (what chapter and verses)? (122—124)
13. What does Furnish see as the *main concern* of Romans 13:1—7? (page 125)
14. What is the difference, in Furnish's view, between *obeying* and *being subject to* the governing authorities? Which one does Paul tell the Christians in Rome to do? (page 126)
15. On page 127 Furnish writes about Romans 13:1—2, "there is nothing distinctively Pauline, or even distinctively Christian, in these first two verses." Why does he say this? What does he mean?
16. Furnish argues that Romans 13:2—4 present the governing authorities as *servants* who are to support the good of the community. Does this seem like a reasonable reading of the text? What elements in the text support it? (127—128)
17. Furnish argues that Paul did not mean by *conscience* in Romans 13:5 what we modern Westerners take that term to mean. What does he think Paul meant by it? Why? (page 129)
18. Furnish thinks the climax of Romans 13:1—7 is found in the last two verses. What is the topic of those verses?
19. Although Paul had never visited Rome, Furnish thinks he knew of a particular problem involving taxes that would be relevant to the Christians there. Why does Furnish think this? (130—131)
20. Explain the tax problem that existed in the late 50s of the first century CE in the Roman Empire. Why is understanding that problem important? (page 132)
21. Where was Paul when he wrote the letter to the Romans? What difference would that make? (132—133)

22. How does Furnish describe the membership of the church at *Corinth*? (page 133)
23. What was the Edict of Claudius, and why is it important for understanding Paul's motives for writing Romans 13:1—7? (page 133)
24. Furnish list three "factors that lie behind the admonition of 13:7. What are those three factors? (133—134)
25. In his summary on page 134, Furnish rehearses the major points in his argument about Romans 13:1—7. What are those points?
26. In the conclusion to this chapter Furnish discusses four "fundamental ways in which this passage may still speak to us today." What are those four ways? (135—138)