



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume 40
Issue 984

“The Powers that Be”

To Whom Does Romans 13:1-7 Refer?

by — Otis Q Sellers (1901-1992)

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Romans 13:1-7, KJV).

Key Points:

Romans 13 is not about being subject to civil authorities..... 8293
Romans 13 should be understood in its dispensational context, specifically during the Acts period when certain spiritual authorities existed..... 8294

No man today can claim one iota of God-given authority over another believer..... 8296
Jesus is our only authority, and all of His dealings with us are in grace..... 8296

INTRODUCTION

A great foundation principle of understanding is that we cannot reason from the *particular* to the *general*. For example: it is not possible for me to prove my citizenship in the United States unless the one who demands the proof will accept the great *general* truth that all men born in this country automatically become citizens. If this *general* truth is rejected, then there is no way of proving the *particular* truth of my personal citizenship.



entered into and accepted this great *general* truth, then the *particular* truth presented here will follow as a natural sequence.

Those who see in Acts 28:28 nothing more than a passing remark of Paul, in which he set forth something which had been true before, and therefore, made no change and introduced nothing new, may just as well cast this study aside without reading it. This message is written to those who recognize that Paul's declaration brought about a new dispensation and a radical change in administration.

(continued on page 8293)

The study presented here deals with a *particular* truth which depends entirely upon the great *general* truth that the words of Paul in Acts 28:28 mark a great dispensational division and that they brought about a definite administrative change.¹ If the reader has

[sational Boundary Line](#), Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Student's Press (on the [order form](#) under "Sellers.")

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1. For further consideration on this subject, see the author's work, — [The Dispensation of the Grace of God & Acts 28:28 – A Dispensation](#)



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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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Scripture education in a weekly format!

This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the universality of death and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:21);
- the unique gospel of Paul – which he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13-28; Acts 20:24);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- the epistles of the present Secret Administration being Ephesians & Colossians (Ephesians 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the One Body (Ephesians 4:16);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the One Body (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);

- union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Romans 6; Ephesians 2:6);
- adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

This publication is the product of humble efforts of ordinary men intended to stimulate the earnest study of Scripture. We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication; thus they are not meant to imply finality on any subject discussed, or that further research would not add further light from the Word of God. God's storehouse of truth is inexhaustible, so draw on its wealth by prayerful study. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

We are always open for discussion, but never for disputation. – André Sneidar

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Romans 13 has been almost universally interpreted as speaking of civil authorities. Therefore, when it is read by the average Bible reader he understands that this passage tells the believer his duty toward kings, presidents, dictators, magistrates, policemen and all such civil rulers and authorities.

Out of thirteen commentaries on the book of Romans which have been consulted, all of them hold that this passage sets forth one's duty toward government. However, most of them provide a loophole of escape from their own interpretations by insisting that the teaching here does not apply when conscience toward God enters into the matter. By this they ignore the fact that this means of escape is denied to them by the statement made in :5,

Wherefore ye must needs be subject ... for conscience sake.

It can be readily seen that the meaning of this entire passage depends entirely upon just who is meant by "higher powers" (or "superior authorities.") If these words signify *civil* authorities such as kings, prime ministers, presidents, and dictators, then every statement in this passage concerns these. But if these two

words do not signify civil authorities, then no statement is necessarily true of them.

It seems that the chief reason for referring the statements of Romans 13 to civil authorities is that there does not seem to be anyone else to whom they can be applied. One expositor sums up his comments as follows:

Since there are no spiritual authorities among men today to whom these words refer, then, in spite of the great difficulties created, we must apply them to civil authorities.

The author of those words stumbled upon the solution without recognizing it in his words "spiritual authorities ... today." Is this not the key to the whole matter? Could it not be that there were "spiritual authorities" in the day when these words were written to whom they could apply without alteration or change?

The moment such a suggestion is made, it will be rejected by those who refuse to recognize any difference between God's administration in the Acts period and God's administration today.



Rightly Dividing Israel's Prophetic Kingdom – With Special Emphasis on The Overlooked Pre-Millennial "Kingdom of the Heavens" (A Comprehensive Compilation)

Editors: Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., André Sneidar

342 pages

1st Ed., A4 (8.3" x 11.7"), 87 chapters, with charts and appendices, from 22 authors.

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There are enormous amounts of prophecy that were given to Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures that are yet to be fulfilled. Most believers simply follow some version of Christendom's eschatology, futilely attempting to force the enormity of Israel's prophetic scene into a few extremely abridged time periods. From this shallow vantage point, it is believed that more time has passed in God's ages than remains. This couldn't be further from the truth. Multiplied millennia remain, more than have yet transpired, for the fulfillment of all of the glorious plans that God has revealed in His Word. Far from being near the "end" of something prophetic, the span of God's eonian plan is immense, and our placement is early in its timeline. Much more of God's prophetic program remains than man's feeble eschatologies allow.

The intention herein is to present an alternative view to the confusing message of the traditional Evangelical concept of prophecy, thus opening the door to a consideration of the idea of a Pre-millennial Kingdom as the fulfillment of many of God's promises to Israel to have their kingdom in the Earth.

All of the material in this book, taken together, is a wonderful resolution to the confusion of the conventional religious theology that has muddled the minds of sincere Bible students for centuries. While we may live in the Secret Administration, that doesn't necessarily mean that God's Word regarding His plans for Israel must be a mystery to us.

It will also be rejected by those who see no difference between the “Church of God” of the Acts period and “the Church which is His Body” of the present time.² Nonetheless, to all of those who have seen clear distinctions in these things that differ, the problem of Romans 13 is simply one more that is solved the moment we obey God’s command to “rightly to divide the word of truth.”

THE DISPENSATIONAL CHARACTER OF ROMANS

It must not be forgotten that the passage under consideration is part of the book of Romans, and that it was written in the Acts period. So, the dispensational character of Romans is that of the Acts period when certain great truths prevailed that do not prevail now. They were in effect then, but they are not in effect now.

In Romans 1:16 it is stated that the gospel is “to the Jew first.” That is not true now. In Ephesians 3:6-7 we find that the Gentile is a joint-partaker of the gospel.

The Jew no longer has *any* advantage, and there is *no* profit in circumcision. There was still “*advantage*” and “*profit*” when Romans 3:1-2 was written, but these are not true now. When the “*salvation of God*” was “*sent to Gentiles*,” the Jew lost every advantage he had ever enjoyed.

There is no “*remnant*” now, as was set forth in Romans 11:5. If God calls and saves one who by nature is a Jew, he is cut off from all that he ever was or ever

2. For more information see, – “[The Body of Christ](#)” or “[The Church Which Is His Body](#)”? A [Compilation on the “One Body” of the Current Administration](#), Bible Student’s Press (on the [order form](#) under “Compilations.”)

could have been as a Jew. The Gentile who is saved today is not grafted into Israel’s good olive tree as stated in Romans 11:17-24.

We are not “*debtors*” to Israel for a single spiritual blessing that we possess. We have **not** been “*made partakers of their spiritual things*.” Our blessings are all in grace, and grace cannot incur debt. The truth set forth in Romans 15:27 is not truth for today.

It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

These things set forth the dispensational character of the Roman epistle, and it only causes confusion when we try to carry them over beyond the dispensational dividing line of Acts 28.

Even so it is with the truth in Romans 13. The explicit statements made there must be altered, weakened, changed and restricted before they can be made to apply to civil authorities of today. But they can be allowed to speak forth with all the glory of a divine pronouncement when we apply them to the God-given spiritual authorities of the Acts period.

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITIES

On the day of Pentecost, the believers in Israel were publicly constituted and set forth as “*the Israel of God*” by the baptism in the Spirit. This was “*the Church of God*” of the Acts period, and it was not without God-arranged and God-appointed authorities. When the Lord announced His purpose to establish this believing remnant, He said to Peter,



“None Other Things”

by — Charles H. Welch (1880-1967)

This is a study of Acts 26:22, “*Saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.*” It demonstrates that Paul had two ministries and that the end of his first ministry and the beginning of his second was Acts 28.

84 pages

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And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven (Matthew 16:19).

Stronger words were never spoken, and no greater authority was ever given to a human being than that which was conferred upon Peter by these words. A key is a badge of power and authority, and these words set forth that Peter (the twelve also, cf. Matthew 18:18) was established as the superior authority. His acts upon Earth were ratified in Heaven.

In John 20:22-23 this authority was extended even to the remitting and retaining of sin. Here indeed was the highest possible authority, and it made those who possessed it “higher powers,” or “superior authorities.”

In Acts 3:6 we see Peter using his great authority to bring healing to a crippled man, and in Acts 5 we see him wielding his authority to the extent that he pronounced a sentence of death upon Ananias and Sapphira. The sentence was executed at his word. He spoke and their death followed. Truly he did not bear “the sword in vain.” He was “God’s minister to them for good,” and those who did evil had good reason to be afraid. This one manifestation of the power that

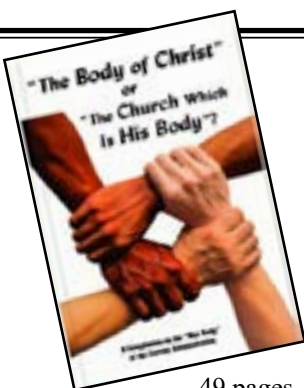
these “higher powers” wielded was so great that “no man dared join himself to them” (Acts 5:13).

In Acts 8 we have the record of Peter pronouncing the death sentence against Simon the sorcerer. His words were, “You perish and your money perish” (Acts 8:20). This sentence of death was held in abeyance while repentance was held out to Simon, who fully recognized the words of Peter were not idle ones (:24).

In Acts 13 we read of Paul using his “superior authority” upon Elymas the sorcerer, who hindered Paul’s work in the gospel. A sentence of actual blindness was pronounced upon him which came to pass even as Paul spoke the words (Acts 13:11).

As in the case of the miracles of Christ (John 20:30), many more such events as these may have occurred which have not been recorded in the Word of God. However, the “superior authority” that was given to men in the Acts period is shown not only by these events, but it is also set forth in many plain statements. And it must be kept in mind that the “superior authorities” of the Acts period were not just the apostles alone.

In Romans 12:8 Paul exhorts those who rule to do it with diligence. He instructed the Thessalonians to



49 pages

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“The Body of Christ” or “The Church Which Is His Body”?

A Compilation on the “One Body” of the Current Administration

In the *Pentecost Administration*, during the Acts period, there were many *ecclesias*, in the plural – “all the ecclesias” (Romans 16:4, 16; I Corinthians 7:17; 14:33; II Corinthians 8:18; 11:28, CV). Each of these ecclesias were, in and of themselves “the body of Christ” – an integrated “one body,” while today in the *Secret Administration* there is but one single ecclesia, in the singular – “the Ecclesia which is His Body” (Ephesians 2:22-23, CV). This ecclesia is universal and not local. This ecclesia of the *Secret Administration* has no bearing whatsoever on locality, and is of necessity, the only “One Body” universal (Ephesians 4:4).

This “One Body” of Ephesians and Colossians (Ephesians 2:16; 4:4; Colossians 3:15) is the *Post-Acts* “church,” of which Christ alone is Head (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:24; 2:19). This is the *only* Ecclesia of the *Secret Administration*.

This short compilation has works from three authors: Tom L. Ballinger, G.J. Pauptit (1889-1962), and Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

know them who “are over you in the Lord” (I Thessalonians 5:12), and in I Corinthians 5 he gave specific instructions concerning the judgment of one who had erred.

When we read Romans 13:1-7 in the light of these truths it becomes very simple. Apostles and others of that time were the “superior authorities” to which every soul was to be subject. These men were “the ministers of God” and their authority was the gift of God. Anyone who resisted their power, resisted God’s ordinance, and such folly was sure to result in judgment. These authorities, with their power to bind and loose, were never a terror to good works but to evil works.

If any complained about the power of the authorities (the words of Romans 13:3 would indicate that some did), they were instructed to do good and they would have no cause to fear. If they did good, they could rest assured that they would receive praise. But if they did evil, they had every cause to fear, for these men did not bear in vain the power to exact the most severe penalties.

They were God’s servants, avengers upon those who committed evil. Therefore, it was essential that they be obeyed, not only in order to escape punishment, but for the sake of conscience well. The God Who gave them their great authority also gave them the wisdom needed to use it right. They never abused their power.

It was because of these things that they were to pay tribute. The word tribute means any pecuniary burden imposed by authority. We who live in countries where church and state are separate have never known of any monetary burden being placed upon us except those imposed by government. This causes us to think of tribute as being purely a civil matter, but this is not the case. The authorities of the Acts period possessed every right to impose any levy that they desired upon any believer. This is seen in the words of Paul in I Corinthians 9:4-6. Paul and Barnabas were probably the only ones who did not exercise their authority and demand their support. Paul insists that this was not because they lacked the power to do so.

ONE LORD

Just as the declaration of “one baptism” set aside all but one of the baptisms that were God’s order in the Acts period, even so the words “one Lord” set aside every spiritual authority in relationship to “the Church which is His Body,” except the Lord Jesus Christ.

The truth of “one Lord” is the central member of the seven great truths that form the unity of spirit in Ephesians 4:4-5. In view of this, *no man today can claim one iota of God-given authority over another believer. To do so is to deny the truth of “one Lord.” To recognize the rule of another in the spiritual realm is to fail to give to Christ that which belongs to Him alone. In the realm of things spiritual we yield authority to no one but the Lord Jesus Christ.*

It would be well indeed for every believer who has entered into an understanding of their position as a member of “the Church which is His Body” to settle once and for all just who or what has authority over him, and to whom or what he is responsible.

The spiritual authorities of the Acts period were never given to “the Church which is His Body.” No authorities have been designated over us, for the truth revealed for us says “one Lord.” He is our only authority, and all of His dealings with us are in grace.³ **BSN**

— *The Word of Truth* magazine (September 1941)
(Later expanded by the author)

(abridged & edited)

[**Editor:**] For further study on Romans 13:1-7 see these resources:

- “Romans 13 & Current Human Government,” Editor’s Desk, Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., [Bible Student’s Notebook 900](#);
- “A Brief Overview of Romans 13,” Tom L. Ballinger, [Bible Student’s Notebook 857](#);
- “Higher Powers and Conventional Christian Interpretation,” Tom L. Ballinger, [Bible Student’s Notebook 809](#).

TOPICS:

Major: Authorities; Government; Right Division; Romans 13
Minor: Acts 28; Acts Period; Apostles; Grace

3. For more on this theme see:

- “Pastors” – [The Ascension Gifts, the Higher Powers of Romans 13, and the Secret Administration](#), Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr., Bible Student’s Press (on the [order form](#) under “Clyde Pilkington”).



Representative Prophetic Passages #3

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Isaiah 2:2-4

And it shall come to pass in the last [resultant] days,¹ that the mountain of **the LORD's House shall be established** in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the House of the God of Jacob; and **He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem.** And He shall **judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat**



their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.²

Kingdom Phase: Pre-Millennial

Characteristics:

- The Reestablishment of the Temple
the Lord's House shall be established (:2)
- There will be a teaching and learning of God's Law
He will teach us of His ways ... for out of Zion shall go forth the Law (:3)
- There will be obedience to God's ways
and we will walk in His paths (:3)
- Many will be rebuked
and shall rebuke many people (:4)
- Things will be set right among the nations
And He shall judge among the nations (:4)

1. Much ado has been made of Scripture's repeated phrase, "the last days," as if it were some single period of the future. A simple reading of passages where the phrase appears will clearly show that the characteristics associated with its use could not possibly be referring to a single period of time. The idea of "last" in the phrase is that of "result" – such as in our English words "culmination," "climax," "consummation" or "conclusion."

Our English word "resultant" is defined as: "Something that results; an outcome." (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Thus, "last days," are "resultant days."

Sadly, prophetic prognosticators have had a heyday with this phrase. All that is needed to understand the phrase "the last days," is to identify the context of days which are being referred to, and then recognize that what is being discussed in the passages is the "result" of these particular days: i.e., "the culmination of these days," "the climax of these days," "the consummation of these days," or "the conclusion of these days."

2. This prophecy is repeated nearly verbatim in Micah 4:1-3.



Who Is Jesus? A Plea for a Return to Belief in Jesus, the Messiah

by — Sir Anthony Buzzard

A work dispelling the error of the Trinity.

48 pages

See order [form under](#) "Other Authors."

- There will be universal peace among the nations, with no need for national defense. Thus, military institutions and armament will be dismantled and replaced by flourishing agricultural operations (with the exception of the testing of Daniel's final week)

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (:4)

Isaiah 42:1-7

This is My Servant; I strengthen Him. This is My Chosen One; I delight in Him. I have put My Spirit on Him; He will bring justice to the nations. He will not cry out, or shout, or make His voice heard in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick; He will faithfully bring justice. He will not grow weak or be discouraged until He has established justice on Earth. The islands will wait for His instruction. This is what God, Yahweh, says – Who created the Heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the Earth and what comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it and life to those who walk on it – “I, Yahweh, have called You for a righteous purpose, and I will hold You by Your hand. I will keep You and appoint You to be a covenant for the people and a light to the

nations, in order to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those sitting in darkness from the prison house (HCSB).

Kingdom Phase: Pre-Millennial

Characteristics:

- Establish worldwide justice (Israel and the Nations)

He will bring justice to the nations ... (:1)

He will faithfully bring justice ... (:3)

until He has established justice on Earth (:4)

- Done without the personal presence of Christ [Parousia]

He will not cry out, or shout, or make His voice heard in the streets (:2)

- Performed with softness, tenderness and gentleness

He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick (:3)

NOTE: This cannot be “the Day of the Lord” (i.e., the Millennial Kingdom of Christ ruling on the Earth).

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TOPICS:

Major: Isaiah 2:2-4; Isaiah 42:1-7; [Pre-Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 2:2-4; Isaiah 42:1-7)]



2nd edition
91 pages

See [order form](#) under “Clyde Pilkington.”

“Pastors” – The Ascension Gifts, the Higher Powers of Romans 13, and the Secret Administration

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The modern role of “pastor” is not founded on Scripture, but instead is an institutional fabrication of Protestantism. The Ascension Gifts of Ephesians 4 were prophetically a part of Israel’s Old Testament promises. The “higher powers” of Romans 13 were not a reference to civil authorities, but rather the spiritual rulers over the Acts-period churches. Since Acts 28 (the dispensational boundary line) the “powers that be” have been withdrawn. Under the current Secret Administration, all of these “gifts” are inoperative. The One Body has no flesh-and-blood rulers. We are to be submissive only to our Head: the Lord Jesus Christ. To Him alone do we owe our allegiance.