

GOD'S WORD IS LIFE

Key Greek Terms

Romans 13

1. Ἐξουσία (Exousia) – Authority

Romans 13:1: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities (ἐξουσίαις). For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

- **Meaning:** The Greek term “ἐξουσία” refers to power or authority, often implying the right to act, command, or rule. In this context, Paul emphasizes that all earthly authorities derive their legitimacy from God. This term underscores the theological basis for respecting governance structures, recognizing that God uses these authorities to provide order and justice, even in a fallen world. For Christians, submitting to “ἐξουσία” means acknowledging God’s hidden work in society through established powers.

2. Διάκονος (Diakonos) – Servant/Minister

Romans 13:4: “For he is God’s servant (διάκονος) for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain.”

- **Meaning:** The word “διάκονος” is typically translated as “servant” or “minister.” Here, Paul uses it to describe governing authorities as instruments of God’s purposes. It highlights the paradox that even those in power are servants within God’s order, tasked with upholding justice. This term reframes the role of authority figures as God’s “διάκονος,” serving His will to promote peace and deter wrongdoing, even if imperfectly.

3. Φόβος (Phobos) – Fear/Respect

Romans 13:7: “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.”

- **Meaning:** “Φόβος” generally means “fear” but can also denote a sense of reverent respect. In this passage, it conveys the attitude believers should have toward those in positions of authority, recognizing them as instruments of God’s governance. This respect is not blind obedience but a response rooted in trust that God is sovereign over all things, including civic powers. “Φόβος” here implies a godly respect, reminding believers that their ultimate allegiance is to God.

4. Ἀγάπη (Agape) – Love

Romans 13:8: “Owe no one anything, except to love (ἀγάπη) one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.”

- **Meaning:** The Greek word “ἀγάπη” signifies a selfless, unconditional love that seeks the good of others without expecting anything in return. Paul uses “ἀγάπη” as the central Christian ethic that transcends all other obligations. For believers, this love is the fulfillment of God’s law, expressing itself in self-giving service. But living out “ἀγάπη” as a continual “debt”, rooted in Christ’s love, can only be lived out in faith.

5. Πληρώω (Plēroō) – Fulfill

Romans 13:10: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling (πλήρωμα) of the law.”

- **Meaning:** “Πληρώω” means to fill, complete, or accomplish. In Romans 13:10, it indicates that love (ἀγάπη) brings God’s commandments to their fullest expression. Rather than following the law in a legalistic manner, Paul urges believers to live in the reality that Christ’s love fulfills all requirements of the law. Through “πλήρωμα,” Paul reveals that love embodies the intention behind every command, guiding the believer to live in harmony with God’s will not through law but love that is active through faith.

6. ἐγείρω (Egeirō) – Awake/Rise

Romans 13:11: “Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake (ἐγείρω) from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

- **Meaning:** The Greek verb “ἐγείρω” means to “arise” or “wake up,” often used in the New Testament to refer to both literal waking and spiritual awakening. Paul uses it here to urge believers to be alert, living in anticipation of Christ’s return. This “awakening” is a call to leave behind the “deeds of darkness” and to live in the light of Christ, embodying the gospel through watchful and faithful lives. “ἐγείρω” signifies a spiritual urgency, reminding believers that they are called to live actively in this world even as we look forward in hope to the fulfillment of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ.
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