

ROMANS 13:1-7 (Part 1)

INTRODUCTION

This week we are jumping into chapter 13 of Romans. We have to remember the context of this passage. From the beginning of Romans until the end of chapter 11 Paul tells us what to believe. Then beginning in chapter 12 Paul tells us how to live. Paul's opening statement in chapter 12 is a great summary of how to live the practical Christian life.

Roman 12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will."

With seasons of persecution at the hands of the Roman government, many Christians thought of Rome as Satanic and something to resist. How should a person with transformed thinking interact with a government that sometimes turned against them? That is what Paul teaches the church in this text.

Today many Christians believe government is part of the satanic world system.

STORY - GOVERNMENT IS EVIL

When Shelly and I were planting a church in Duluth I met a guy who began to yell and generally go bananas when he found out that our church plant was going to file for official non-profit status with the government. This guy believed government is evil and Christians should have nothing to do with the government. He saw all governments as part of the world system under the control of Satan.

Romans 13 gives us God's perspective of human governments and how to deal with them.

Romans 13

Be Subject to Government

1Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OR CIVIL AUTHORITY?

Governing authorities are from God. In chapter 13 verse one Paul says, “*...there is no authority except from God.*” That is a remarkable statement—ALL authority comes from God. God has all the authority there is to have in the universe. However God has delegated some of his authority to flow through other channels. Paul says, “**the authorities that exist are established by God.**” God does not just reluctantly put up with government, he thought up the governments of this world.

***Proverbs 8:15-16* says, “By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth.”**

Jesus told Pontius Pilate, ***“You would have no authority over me if it were not given to you from above.”***

Twice Paul calls the ruler of a civil government, ***“God’s servant.”*** For us in the United States that means the President, the legislature, the local authorities, even the IRS are performing a divine service.

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW CORRUPT GOVERNMENTS?

So if governments work for God why is there corruption of some degree in every government?

First, this is a corrupt planet. Government authorities are human and all humans have sinful tendencies. One of the geniuses of the American form of government is its checks and balances. Those who wrote our constitution knew people were corrupt and could not be trusted with anything but *limited* power.

A second reason God allows corrupt governments to exist is to highlight His glory. One day, there will be an earthly government controlled by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah prophesies, ***“And the government shall be upon his shoulders.” And he shall reign “from that time on and forever.”*** ***Revelation 19* says, “He will rule...with an iron scepter.”**

When Jesus comes and runs this planet in perfect justice and perfect wisdom, all the other governments that came before—even the good ones, will pale by comparison. We will see just what an incredibly poor job even the most fair-minded authorities have done compared to Christ.

God wrote history from the back to the front and his agenda is always to show off His glory. What better way to show off the glory of His Son than

to give us 6000 years of government filled with fraud, incompetence and inequity, followed by the perfect government of Jesus Christ?

When we see the harm that some governments can bring to people, it should drive us to our knees and cause us to cry out, *“Come, Lord Jesus.”*
“your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE TO THESE AUTHORITIES

Verse one tells us we are to *“submit...to the governing authorities.”* Paul tells us in verse three that if we do not submit to the authorities we should be afraid. In the original language, it is actually a command to *“Be afraid.”* If you don’t submit, then be afraid because the government is an arm of God. If you fail to submit to an authority God has put in place, the only appropriate response is to be afraid.

The reason for this fear is that God has invested government with the authority to punish those who fail to submit. In verse four Paul says the ruler, *“does not bear the sword for nothing, He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrong doer.”* “The sword” as Paul uses that word here is a broad term for all kinds of punishment. The state is invested with God’s authority to punish those who err.

Fines, community service, jail time and capital punishment are included in this word translated “sword.” This idea is also seen in 1 Peter 2:13-14. *Peter says, Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the King, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right.”*

The earthly authorities hand out these punishments, but ultimately they come to the offender by God’s will and hand. The state is God’s agent of punishment and discipline. We see this even more powerfully in verse

two. Paul says, “...*he who rebels against authority... will bring judgment upon themselves.*”

In verse five Paul says that we are to submit to the authorities “*not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.*” In other words, the Christian should not be motivated only by fear of punishment. If the only reason we refuse to break the law is because we don’t want to get caught, we are functioning on the same level as much of the world.

If you pulled out on hwy 70 and drove for a while what would you think if there was a long line of cars going 55 miles per hour? There are only two options I can think of. There is either a really old person with weak eye sight in the front of the line of cars or it is the sheriff. Most people obey the speed limit because they are stuck and can’t pass or because they are afraid the sheriff will punish them.

This should not be the case for the believer. The reason we submit to civil authority is because we know that in doing so we are submitting to God and we want our conscience to steer our path, not simply our fear of punishment and getting caught.

SUBMIT TO THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY

So what if the government tells you to do something that is clearly against God’s word? In Acts five, the Sanhedrin told the apostles to stop preaching the gospel and Peter responded with these words; “*we must obey God rather than men!*” God told them to preach, the Sanhedrin told them to stop. So the apostles submitted to the higher authority.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Marching for equal treatment for minorities, picketing places that kill the unborn, telling people about Jesus when governments tell us to be quiet,

and meeting together for fellowship when governments do not allow us to meet. These are issues faced by Christians around the world today where they are called to obey a higher authority.

Most of us have no objection for laws against murder and theft and fraud and trespassing. We are happy to submit to them and are thankful authorities are in place to protect us. Where we have less enthusiasm is in areas like the one Paul mentions in verse six, paying taxes. This is harder for us because we can easily point out unfairness in the tax code. We will get no help from Paul in justifying our failure to pay every penny we owe. He echoes Jesus call to ***“give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar”*** and what belongs to Caesar is, according to Paul, whatever he asks through his civil authority.

And there are other governmental authorities that we are less likely to take seriously. These would include things like village and township rules for proper waste disposal, burning ordinances, building codes and the like. Those kinds of things are not of the same magnitude as laws against murder. But if we choose to ignore them we are sinning against God. When we refuse to comply with them because they are “no big deal” we are telling God that his authority over us is “no big deal” because they are expressions of his authority. We may be able to look at a building code or a speed limit or a regulation on waste disposal and give ten reasons why its stupid, why its unfair and why it’s a pain in the neck.

That is all perfectly irrelevant. Our motivation for submitting to those authorities is because we believe we are submitting to authority ordained by God. And to fail to submit to God’s authority is sin. And unrepentant sin brings consequences both in this life and the next. To fail to submit in these

areas is to show that you don't really care about rebelling against His authority.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

One of the things the kids are always bothering me about is wearing my seatbelt. I don't like the way a seat belt feels and I can't stand it when the belt locks me in place preventing me from reaching things I have dropped on the floor. I knew I was going to preach on this text many months ago and the Holy Spirit has been bothering me about many aspects of the law that I often disregard.

Ultimately, it's not about wearing a seat belt or following the speed limit or getting that building or burning permit. It's about submitting to God.

A true, growing believer in Jesus has a standard of conduct that is much higher than the rules set by a government. When you are focusing on how to love those who are treating you like dirt, how hard will it be keeping the zoning regulations? When you are seeking every day to live out a standard of conduct that will be respected and admired, using Paul's phrase in *12:17*, "*in the eyes of all*" then how much more will you be willing to drive the speed limit? If you are taking seriously Paul's command to overcome evil with good, then will following city codes on waste disposal be any huge chore? If we are seeking to please God in the so-called "radical" ways, then the requirements of our government will be no real burden. The citizens of heaven will certainly be good citizens of earth without any problem.

Romans 13:1-7 tells us what we are to do if we are people who are living totally committed lives to Christ. If we are not submitting to the authorities, whether it is a speed limit or paying every cent we owe to the government, or wearing the seatbelt, then we have a spiritual problem with

God. We are, in that area, living in rebellion and are anything but a “living sacrifice” to God. God calls us to submit to the authorities and do it out of love for Him. May God give us grace to see all our lives as worship before God and to live in submission to His authority.

Romans chapters 12 –15 is really about how Romans 12:1-2 are lived out in different situations we might face. So let’s close this message by reading once more Romans 12:1-2. Let the Holy Spirit show you how this passage is relevant and will challenge you in your life and mine right now.

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