

Romans – Bible Study – Chapter 13:1-7

Paul addressed what our relationship should look like between us and God (Romans 12:1-2) and between us and our fellow believers (12:3-21). It is important that our words match our actions, as what we do has an impact on those who are recipients of those words and actions.

In this chapter, Paul explains to us what the Christian's responsibilities towards civil government should be. The phrase that Christ spoke, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21) is expounded in this chapter of Romans and it has an impact on the propagation of the Gospel. It is important to note that the church is not a nation among nations like Israel, therefore, it was important for Paul to clarify the responsibilities of each person within the church.

Submission to Governing Authorities

(Verses 1-2) What does it mean to 'submit' (NIV) or 'to subject' (ESV)? It is the same as obedience? When should we submit to the authority of the government (Titus 3:1; John 19:10-11; Daniel 4:17)? What are we doing if we do not submit or subject to the authority of the government? What should be the basis of our submission (1 Peter 2:13-17)?

- To submit involves placing oneself under the authority of another and doing or not doing what the authorities require
- It includes obedience, but also includes an attitude which the obedience springs from
- It also includes an attitude of compliance and deference that is not necessarily present in obedience
- It also implies a proper honor and respect for those in authority (see verse 7 as well)
- Submission or subjection goes beyond mere obedience as it examines the attitude and heart of why we are obeying
- We should always be submitting to the authority of the government
- All human authority comes from God and has been established by Him
- **John 19:10-11** – Christ answers Pilate by stating that authority is given only by God to whom he chooses
- **Daniel 4:17** – Again states that all authority comes from God
- Therefore, in obeying civil authority, we are obeying God and likewise, if we rebel against civil authority, we are rebelling against God
- We will also be rejecting what God has chosen for His purposes and implicitly saying that you don't agree with whom He has chosen
- **1 Peter 2:13-17** – Peter (along with Paul) instructs that we should be subject to authorities for the Lord's sake as they are instilled to bring law and order
- Those who resist God's ordained authority can expect to suffer condemnation by the government and by God

(Verses 3-5) What is the role of our government (1 Timothy 2:21)? Under normal circumstances, what Paul speaks applies. However, if the government is evil, how are we to submit to them (Acts 5:29; Philippians 3:20)? What is our hope in light of this type of situation (Romans 8:28)? What does 'conscience' refer to in this passage?

- Civil rulers are God's agents to maintain order so that we can live godly and peaceful lives (1 Timothy 2:21)
- This can be seen through their actions, as they are agents of God's judgement, executing God's wrath against evil
- God has ordained various spheres of authority for the blessing and protection of those under authority: the government, the local church, the family, and employment
- Since God has established those in power, it also implicitly states that their power is limited and does not go beyond what God would allow them (see Revelation 13 and how God limit's Satan's powers)

- *Depending on the view you take (for verse 3), it can either mean Christians can partake in revolutions or they should only make their voice heard for change and alignment with what God wants. Either way, they should be prepared to accept the consequences that the government will deal them according to the laws of the land.*
- The view(s) in question (for verse 3) are “what it should be” or “what it is”
- Remember that Paul was in the midst of an evil Roman empire and did many things that violated God’s laws, however, he still asks the Roman readers to be submissive to the governing authorities at the time
- We are to be submissive to the government and its rules as long as it does not violate what God states (**Acts 5:29**)
- However, if the government allows evil under the guise of ‘laws’, are we to disobey them?
- Remember that Paul was in the midst of an evil Roman empire and did many things that violated God’s laws, however, he still asks the Roman readers to be submissive to the governing authorities at the time
- Looking at specific examples in the bible (i.e. Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the book of Daniel), the followers of God still pledged allegiance to God (see Daniel 3:8-30; chapter 8 also)
- Paul and Peter would not obey the commands or laws of the governing authority when it violated God’s law and ultimately paid with their life
- However, having said that, it must be said that each believer must prayerfully consider each situation that they are facing
- Some situations are clear while others or not so
- If the governing body ‘requires’ or ‘mandates’ that all citizens follow a law that is against the will and law of God, we need to react strongly and obey what God has commanded, not the government
 - This will likely result in a punishment from the governing authorities for breaking that law
- If the governing body ‘permits’ a law where a citizen can choose to follow and it is against the will and law of God, we should voice our opinion and continue to teach others what the bible teaches on the subject and to live in that command
- ‘Conscience’ refers to the believer’s knowledge of God’s will and purposes
- Therefore, our knowledge of God’s purposes should dictate and guide us as to what we should do when there is a conflict between what the governing body requires from us and what God requires from us
- The general principle must be stated and be made clear to all: God has ordained government authority and we must be in subjection to it or we are in rebellion against God himself
 - I state general principle, meaning that there are exceptions and by following the laws and rules of God does not mean you won’t be punished by the ruling authority
 - The likelihood of being punished for disobedience will be high

(Verses 6-7) What does Paul say about paying taxes to the government? Is it optional? Why do you think it is important that Paul put this matter in this letter (Luke 10:7)?

- It is not optional, but rather mandatory
- Government workers are indirectly God’s servants and we should support God’s servants (Luke 10:7)
- This is important because the governing authorities are there to provide a service for the good of the people and cannot be expected to provide a service for free
- The use of taxes is for the greater good of the people
- Though you may not necessarily agree to where all your tax dollars go to, you still need to pay them because of the other services that are provided

(Verse 7) Why does Paul mean when he talks about giving respect and honour to those whom it is owed? How do we do that and what does it look like?

- Recall that they are servants and agents that God has established for the good of the people
- Therefore, by respecting and honouring them, you are indirectly honouring and respecting God
- This can look like when we comply with what is asked of us through the laws and legislation
- You may not respect and honour the person, but you need to respect and honour the office.

Paul shows us how we are to relate to the civil authorities around us. He tells us that they are appointed by God and that they are only in power because of His authority. Since God has placed these people into places of authority, we are required to submit to their authority as they acting on God's behalf. The government is there to maintain laws for our benefit and to enrich our lives. However, there may be times when the governing bodies will ask us to do what is contrary to what God would have us do, at which time, we must hold fast to the God's commands and not waver in our faith. We have hope that whoever is in power, God has instilled them there for His purposes, like in the account of Pharaoh and the Jewish people, "... I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Romans 9:17)

Points to Ponder:

- Do you follow everything that the governing authorities command you to do? Or do you pick and choose what suits you?