

Pt 44 Romans 13:1-7 Christian Obedience to Government

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Porchlight Baptist Church www.pbcknox.com

Romans 13:1-7

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 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.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

This morning we are going to be preaching about a Bible doctrine that is a really tough one for many Christians to accept. Up to this point, Paul has been dealing with the Christian's behavior in the Church and with our fellow man; however, now he focuses upon our behavior toward civil government powers those who lawfully rule over us.

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Notice this is written to "every soul." Your soul is your very essence, your being, your life force. The Bible says in **Genesis 2:7** *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* A soul lives forever. When we die, our soul lives on in either Heaven or Hell. Everyone has a soul whether they seem like it or not. Since this is a letter written to believers in Rome, then it is safe to say it is directed toward us and not particularly the rest of the lost world.

With that in mind, God's Word says that every soul (WE) is subject unto the higher powers. It's obvious from reading this entire passage that the "higher powers" being referenced here would be civil leaders, rulers, magistrates, government officials, law enforcement, and so on. You see, even though Christian's are citizens of Heaven, while here on earth we are also citizens of earth. In other words, we have "dual citizenship" and there are rules in place for both places.

I want you to keep in mind that Rome officially became an Empire 27 BC and ruled the world for around 1,000 years. During Paul's day Rome was a polytheistic empire, meaning they worshipped many different gods. During the time Paul wrote this Epistle to the Romans (57 or 58 AD) Christianity and the worship of Jesus was illegal and under Nero, many Christians were killed. It wasn't until around 313 AD that Rome began transitioning to Christianity, but that was long after Paul had been dead and gone.

During Paul's day, the Roman government made it extremely hard on Christians and anyone who was not a Roman. It would have been very difficult not to want to rebel against all of the laws and edicts passed down from Rome and the local magistrates. This is one reason Paul addresses this issue with his readers. While we may not live in Rome, the Bible and the truths given it is timeless.

These same Biblical principles that Paul taught apply to us today as well.

It is difficult for us to accept the last part of verse one which says: **For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.**

If you look at our leaders in the United States today it seems strange that God ordained them into power. But if you believe the Bible then you must believe that is true.

I'm not trying to preach politics but from 2017 to 2021 the President of the United States was Donald Trump. His life is an open book, and we all know his history and most of his life he has lived pretty sinful; however, as President, he worked for the people and accomplished many great things during his tenure. As a Christian, I did not agree with his lifestyle or manner, but I felt safe, and the U.S. prospered under him. There were many people that hated him and spent 4-years trying to destroy him. Lots of democrats claimed, "he's not my president." Yet Christians would say "well, like him or not, you should pray for him like the Bible says to do in **Daniel 2:21** *And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.*"

On January 9th of 2021, the first thing I did when our current President took power was to publicly state on social media, the following:

Here is my one and only "political" post about our current situation. You can agree with me or disagree, doesn't matter to me - move along, unfriend me, blast me, whatever, but the truth is if you claimed Daniel 2:21 when Trump was elected, you must also do the same for Biden. God is sovereign, not subject to your political beliefs, doesn't play favorites, nor does He need your approval.

I did not vote for Biden, but he is the elected President of the United States, in which I am an earthly citizen of. Therefore, I will recognize him as such, and pray for him as I am instructed to do and continue to trust in the Lord and believe in His Word.

1 Timothy 2:1-6 *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*

Sadly, I did not receive very much support from my fellow Christians. I'm friends with at least fifty different Preachers on Facebook and only four of them agreed with me. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt and assume the rest of them didn't see what I posted.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

The Bible only gives us one reason to resist civil government and that is when they order us to do something that is disobedient to God's Word. We see a few examples of this in the Bible:

Exodus 1:15-17 *And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: 16 And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.*

There were also examples in the Book of Daniel when Danial, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to eat of the Kings meat. Also, when a law was passed that made it illegal to worship anyone except the King, Daniel refused to obey that law and instead openly prayed to the Lord God 3-times a day.

Another example we find in the New Testament in: **Acts 4:18-20** And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

But defying civil authority is forbidden except in cases where it would be in direct violation of God's Word. Paul says when we resist the power over us that we are resisting the ordinances of God. Not only that but also, **they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.** That word "**damnation**" is defined as: **punishment, condemnation, or sentenced by a judge.**

So, this is not meaning damnation in hell from God but rather damnation or punishment from the authority they resisted. In other words, don't think you can defy the law and get by with it. If you get caught, you're going to get punished.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:
4 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.

Here Paul explains that these civil rulers are not looking to cause problems for those who do good, but they punish those who do evil, or break the law. He says if you do what is good and obey the law then you have nothing to worry about, in fact, you will be praised for being a lawful citizen. On the opposite side, if you decide to defy the law and do evil and break the law then you better be afraid at what's to come to you. These rulers dole out punishment on law breakers.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

Here we are told that we are to obey civil authorities and laws to avoid punishment, but not only that, but to have a clear conscience. As a Christian we also have the extra benefit of the Holy Spirit guiding us, but even non-Christians have a conscience. Our conscience is what guides our actions and makes us choose between what is right and wrong. Unsaved people may not have the correct conscience because it requires having a conscience guided by good moral and on a spiritual level.

Listen to what the Bible says about the conscience in **2 Corinthians 1:12** For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

Paul says we should rejoice in the testimony of our conscience. The only way we can do that is if we have a clear conscience, not one racked by guilt and shame, and a good conscience can only come about through godly sincerity, not fleshly wisdom of the world.

6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Next Paul brings up paying taxes. That is what he is referring to when he says "pay ye tribute." Every government has a tax system. It is the way things are paid for. We don't always agree with it, and we begrudge paying them, but the fact is the Bible tells us that we are to pay taxes as required by the government.

Jesus certainly believed in paying taxes and did so.

Matthew 17:24-27

24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, **What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?**

26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, **Then are the children free.**

27 **Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.**

He also taught gave the Pharisees a lesson in taxes:

Matthew 22:15-22

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk.

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men.

17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, **Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? 19 Shew me the tribute money.** And they brought unto him a penny.

20 And he saith unto them, **Whose is this image and superscription?**

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, **Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.**

22 When they had heard *these words*, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

What a shame it is to know there are Christians out there who purposely try to cheat the tax system. The Bible doesn't say you have to enjoy doing it, but it does say you are to do it.

The way we deal with those in the world is very important. The world is watching us and waiting for us to mess up and do wrong. It is God's will that strive to live lawfully and obey the laws of the land. Let me read you one last passage of Scripture concerning this:

1 Peter 2:13-16 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. 15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16 As free, and not using *your* liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.