

## ULTIMATE SUBMISSION TO GOD AND THEN TO MAN

(SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2013)

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**Scripture Reading:** Daniel 2:16-49; Rom. 13:1-7

### **Introduction**

Romans 13:1-7 is one of the key texts in the NT dealing with civil government.

Not the only text – 1 Peter 2:13-17 is similar.

We have also several statements by our Lord concerning the duty we have to civil government.

### **Historical background is important.**

Nero became emperor at the age of 17, just 3 years before Paul wrote the book of Romans.

Nero was directed by philosopher Seneca and by a soldier Burrus. (John Calvin's first published book was on a work written by Seneca, *On Clemency*, which recommended to Nero that he rule leniently.)<sup>1</sup>

Michael Grant writes:

During these harmonious years a good many useful administrative reforms were pushed through. For example, provincial governors and their functionaries were prevented from extorting large sums from the local populations for gladiatorial shows. And at home there were measures to improve public order, careful provisions against forgery, and sensible reforms of treasury procedure. Moreover during these years the emperor himself, as he grew out of his teens, did quite a lot of solid, useful work.<sup>2</sup>

We also know that Nero hoped to abolish indirect taxation in Rome just one year after Paul wrote the book of Romans. There was a rising flow of complaints about private tax-collectors whom the Romans used for the collection of such taxes. Nero's idea was not carried out in full, in part because the Romans would have had to resort to other means of taxation to fund their mighty empire.<sup>3</sup>

Paul we know took advantage of his Roman citizenship.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Grant, *The Twelve Caesars*, 154.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, 156.

<sup>3</sup> Grant, 157.

It is significant that this instruction in Romans 13 is written to Christians who lived in the capital of the mighty Empire. This was still a time of relative peace. It would not be long before the emperor and the empire would turn directly against the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul who here commands general submission would later die under Roman rule.

The book of Revelation would later portray the Roman Empire as a beast.

And in our text though Paul speaks positively of civil rulers and their authority, he reminds them that they are not divine. They also must submit to the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a familiar text but may God use this text to speak to this congregation and encourage you in your duty before God and before men.

**You must show ultimate submission to God and secondary submission to civil rulers.**

### **1) SUBMISSION TO GOD IS THE FOUNDATION OF SUBMISSION TO OTHERS.**

a) Paul – a slave of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:1.

b) Romans 13:1 – speaks of God’s sovereignty. He grants authority and places men in positions of power.

What a far cry from the pagan view of government or the idea that governments depend on men for their power. No, verse 1 establishes the truth concerning government.

c) Romans 13:2 – speaks of resisting God’s decree or ordinance.

d) Romans 13:2 – *those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*

This could be the judgment that comes from civil government, but it probably is better to see here reference to God’s judgment.<sup>4</sup>

e) Notice also that three times Paul speaks of rulers as **God’s ministers**. They are not gods themselves. They must see themselves as servants of God. Paul uses language commonly used at the time for civil rulers, though the terms also have a religious usage, but Paul calls them **servants or ministers of God**.

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<sup>4</sup> Moo, 797. See also Calvin on Romans 13:2.

f) Paul in verse 5 speaks of conscience' sake. The word conscience doesn't here just refer to a sense of guilt. **It has reference to God's providential ordering of human history.**<sup>5</sup>

g) What is the connection between Romans 12 and 13? Some deny that there is a connection.

Romans 13:1-7 is a beautifully and very logically written section. Certainly it must be related to what comes before it.

Romans 12:1-2 – living sacrifice – focused on the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:18 – Live peaceably with all men.

Romans 12:19 – Don't take God's vengeance into your own hands.

Many first focus on civil government when they read this text. That is certainly part of the focus. But what I call you especially to consider is your duty to be absolutely subject to God.

- Obedience, sacrifice, and willingness then to suffer for Him.

What is the greatest loss in our nation? It is not failure to follow the US Constitution, but the rejection of the authority and law of the living God.

## **2) GOD HAS ESTABLISHED CIVIL RULERS AND GIVES THEM AUTHORITY.**

a) Romans 13:1 – There is no authority except from God.

Romans 13:1 – The authorities that exist are appointed by God.

R.C Sproul – “God casts the final ballot in every election.”<sup>6</sup>

b) Resisting legitimate authority is resisting God.

Word **resist** in verse 2 shares the same root as the verb **appoint** in verse 1.

c) Three times Paul calls civil rulers God's ministers or servants. He uses two related terms that have religious usage also. But what is key is not the term but that they are called God's servants or ministers.

d) Key: Good and evil must be defined by God's Law Word.

Verses 3 and 4 speak of good works and evil works. Do what is good and you will have praise from civil rulers. Civil rulers are to be God's ministers for good. It is those who do evil that are to be afraid.

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<sup>5</sup> Moo, 803.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Righteous Shall Live by Faith: Romans*, 443.

e) Civil rulers have been given the sword. It is both a symbol of authority as well as a reference to the actual use of the sword in executing wrath on evil doers.

R. C. Sproul in his commentary shared a conversation he had with a US Senator who did not believe governments could force people. “Senator, do you realize that you have just told me you do not believe the federal government has the right to govern, because government is legalized force?”<sup>7</sup>

### **3) YOU ARE CALLED TO SUBMIT TO LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY AND OBEY UNLESS THAT WOULD BE SINNING.**

a) Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.

Not just **some people** – but you also.

**Subject** – not obey, but obedience does come from this.

Ben Witherington comments on the verb Paul uses here:

The text uses the verb *hypotassō* in v. 1 and then again in v. 5. This verb means not “obey” but “submit.” **Paul does not counsel blind obedience.** Three Greek verbs could be translated “obey,” and Paul uses none of them here. *Hypotassō* refers to a proper ordering of oneself under the order God has established. Since the verb is in the middle voice here, the focus is on the voluntary or self-impelled nature of the submission. It is a matter of accepting the relationship God has placed one in...<sup>8</sup>

b) Romans 13:5 - You must be subject because of wrath and the sake of understanding God’s providential ordering of all things.

c) Paul in verse 6 speaks of the current practice of Christians in Rome – you pay taxes.

d) God calls for you to render or pay to all what is owed to them.

i) taxes – direct taxes given to Rome

ii) customs – indirect taxes. This would include customs, fees for various services, and so on.<sup>9</sup>

iii) fear or respect. Is this always an easy command?

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<sup>7</sup> Sproul, 444.

<sup>8</sup> Witherington, 312.

<sup>9</sup> Moo, 805, fn. 83.

iv) honor.

**1Pet. 2:17** Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1) Paul does not deal with all the issues that must be considered. There is guidance we seek from other parts of God's Word. However, the force of this text must not be blunted.

The Christian is not weak. The one who is following Jesus Christ lives in submission to Him and then to others recognizing God's sovereign power and even judgment.

2) A very important issue at that time was the witness of Christians. Would they just be known as a bunch of rebels?

No, they would be characterized by peace (12:18) and by proper submission.

Justin Martyr (2<sup>nd</sup> century apologist) gave a defense of the faith to the Emperor Pius arguing that he should examine the lives of Christians. They were above all citizens the most scrupulous in paying their taxes and in their obedience to the civil magistrate.<sup>10</sup>

3) Dealing with tyrannical governments is a difficult issue. Living under Soviet, Nazi, or the rule of the Red Chinese – governments that murdered nearly 100,000,000.

One of the key doctrines that came from the time of the Reformation is the Duty of the Lesser Magistrate.

In 1548, Charles V, the Emperor, issued the Augsburg Interim.

It called for all Protestants under his authority to adopt Catholic beliefs and practices. It did give Protestant clergy the right to marry and serve both the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Some went along. Others resisted and had to flee.

One city took a stand against the Augsburg Interim. On April 13, 1550 the pastors of Magdeburg issued their Confession and Defense of the Pastors and other ministers of the Church of Magdeburg.<sup>11</sup>

Five months later, Charles V marched on the city. A siege lasted for over a year. 468 citizens of the city died, while 4000 of Charles V's forces. Finally the siege ended on Nov. 4, 1551.

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<sup>10</sup> Sproul, 441.

<sup>11</sup> The city is located about 90 miles west of Berlin.

The Confession written by the pastors of the city was the first confession to set forth the doctrine of the Lesser Magistrate. Lesser authorities have a God-given right and duty to resist unjust laws and decrees.

By God's grace the pastors and citizens of Magdeburg were faithful to God. Their work and writings influenced John Knox, Theodore Beza, and others and was influential in our own nation.

4) What you should most want to show to others – not that you are a rebel, an independent American, not a do-it-my-way person, but one who lives in direct and outward submission to Jesus Christ.

**Acts 5:29** ¶ But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.

**Acts 4:13** ¶ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

Is it clear to others that you have been with Jesus Christ? Is this what you most want others to see? That is your calling in being a slave of Jesus Christ by faith in His sacrificial life, death, and resurrection.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, may you be filled with great awe and love for Him so that others know what is your strength and purpose.

## **Prayer**

**Hymn: 623**

**Benediction – 2 Cor. 13:11, 14**

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.