

Romans 13:1-7 (NKJV)

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Since we are moving to a new text this morning we need to get the flow of the context.

Some would say that Romans 13 is completely unrelated to the text before it. But I think it is fairly easy to see how it **very much** relates to the text before it.

Paul was telling us in chapter 12 how we are to live peaceably with other people.

Now what is a primary function of the state? Is it not to enable us to live peaceably with one another, to maintain order and to avoid disaster?

Then remember what Paul said about vengeance? We are not to take vengeance.

Where does that justice often come from? It often comes from the one that wields the sword- the civil government.

And thirdly, isn't our relationship with the state one of the main ways we relate to those around us? Isn't this perfectly in keeping with his topic?

I don't think it is at all difficult to connect the dots from chapter 12 to chapter 13.

I would encourage all of us to jump into this text with open minds, allowing scripture to tell us what God has to say about government. Our text this morning is the most extensive instruction about how Christians are to live under the law of the land. It also tells us the **function**, the **role** and the **origin** of government.

Let's start by understanding that all through scripture there has always been a separation between the civil government and the spiritual leadership. Even in the Old Testament law, the power of civil government and spiritual government were not held by the same person. I think it is safe to say that when people followed God's way of doing things, those two authorities were separated.

Those in Martin Luther's day tried an experiment where the spiritual leaders were also the civil leaders. It resulted in a person with opposing spiritual views being burned to death.

Over human history there have been, generally speaking, 4 models that have been tried.

Erastianism- The state controls the church

Theocracy- The church controls the state

Constantinianism- The compromise in which the state favors the church and the church accommodates to the state in order to retain its favor.

Partnership- The church and the state recognize and encourage each other's distinct God given responsibilities in a spirit of constructive collaboration.

Obviously the fourth is the proper form and it is what is presented in Romans 13.

Before we go on we need to think about this a bit. Do you wish our government made laws that were more representative of what scripture says? I know I tend to wish that were true. But take that to its extreme. If the church were to rule the state, the problem always ends up being **which faction of the church will rule?** And if it does rule, and has the power of the sword, what will happen to all **the other factions?** We need to be careful of what we wish for.

When we read about Sharia law what we are seeing is essentially a Theocracy. And it is bad news. And if we were to have a theocracy based on the Christian faith, it would likely be **equally bad**. God separated church and state for a reason. We do well to appreciate that fact and not expect the civil government to accomplish what it wasn't designed for.

Our government will never accomplish a utopian state. It will never accomplish absolute peace and prosperity. It will not remove hunger or poverty. And it will never maintain the proper balance between control and freedom. It just won't. There is no promise in scripture that this will be accomplished by men.

One of the things we will notice as we go through this text is that there is no **single type of government** that is singled out as **having God's blessing**. I am very grateful for our form of government. I like the idea of representation and having a tiny say in what our leaders do. But **our form** of government is not given any

more endorsement than **any other kind** of government in this text. In Romans, Paul is telling all of us as world citizens how to live under the rule of the state... **any** rule of the state. And as much as we may not like it, **the command is universal**. And the existence of the **rule of the civil government** is also universal. Whether you have a King, a parliament, a president, or as Iran has, a self proclaimed supreme leader, the instructions are the same. So let's delve into the text.

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.

Well, there is no doubt who this is addressing. It is at least to all believers. It probably applies to all humans but **not all human beings** are likely to submit to scripture. So this is at least an instruction for all believers. In other words, it is for us. There is no getting around it.

But what about those under rulers who are oppressive and care nothing for those they rule over? There are no caveats given. It is to everyone.

Then we are to be **subject**. This is in the passive imperative sense so it means that **it is a command**. And we are to **actively** do this thing. It is something we **can** do and we **must** do.

Now what does it mean **to be subject to**? Well this word is used a lot in scripture and it is not a synonym for obey. Things get a little confusing if you try to use this word to say that we must obey everything. There are those who make this mistake and they then are forced by their convictions to obey the government, even if the government forbids something that God commands. That clearly is not the case as we will explore. But we are to regard the state as what it is, and that the agents of the state have been given a position of something that represents God in specific ways. The word for submission is actually a military term and it has to do with rank. As Christian people we are to recognize the rank these people have been given in this God ordained position. When they are carrying out their duties, they outrank us. As such we should honor them, respect them and put ourselves under them in that regard. When we look at those people carrying out their duty, they outrank us from God's perspective. He gave them the authority and that status.

How about governing authorities? What does that mean? It essentially means what it looks like. Paul is talking about the positions of civil authorities. He is talking about agents of the state. Now is he talking about the actual people filling those spots or is he talking about the positions they fill. I tend to see it as the positions, but I am open to be wrong about that.

Okay, right off the bat we have a command to obey. We are to submit ourselves to the civil authorities. We are to recognize that God has placed them where they are and that they do hold authority over us, **not absolute authority**, but some specific authority.

Now how do we flesh this out? Does this mean that we are sinning if we violate a law of the land? There are laws that say that car tires must have a certain amount of tread. Do we commit a sin when our tire spins that one extra time that takes us to that into that illegal condition? Is it possible to be submissive to the governing authorities while at the same time ignorant of some infractions? I think it is. If my tires are in an illegal condition, I recognize the authority of a government official to tell me that this my tire is in an illegal condition and I will submit to his rule to get a new tire. I will also submit to any fine that is associated with that discovery.

I don't think that the emphasis of this passage is to get us to the place that we become experts on every jot and title of the laws that our civil governments think up. In our environment that would be a full time job. But it is very clear that we, as citizens of our land, must be actively submitted to those who inform and enforce our rules. We cannot have a cavalier attitude that says I will do what I want and I don't care what they say. We must recognize and submit to their authority over us.

Do we have that attitude? Do we actively and willingly submit to the rule of the government over us? According to this scripture, we must.

As always, when preparing this sermon I had to ask myself the question, "how about me?" And the first thing that came to mind was seat belts. I have been guilty plenty of times of considering whether I wanted to wear my seat belt and choosing not to. Is that a disobedience of this command?

Well, did God ever tell me not to wear a seat belt? No. So it is not an issue of a higher priority.

Does our constitution, our highest civil authority, forbid the government to make such a law. No. I am not aware of such a thing.

Is it a law that falls into the civil authorities responsibility to protect its people?

Yes. Even though I think it goes too far, yes it is.

So in my submission, do I have any reason to disobey? No. I am afraid I don't. So should I obey? I am afraid so.

Now I want you to understand, I have never resisted the government in their enforcement of this law. I have always accepted and paid the fine without a fuss.

But I am believing, based on this text, that this is not enough. The civil authority has the authority to tell me to wear my seat belt. So when I think of it, I should. I do not like admitting that. But that is what it says.

Do I sin if I forget to wear it? In my opinion I do not, because I am still submissive to that government and did not intend to rebel. To me the real question is, will I submit when I am aware of it? And the answer is, unless there is a God ordained reason not to, I must.

This is just a real life application of this scripture to me.

Now, why must we submit to those in authority?

There are seven reasons given. We will go as far as verse 4 this morning.

First- vs1 the authorities are appointed by God

Second- vs2 by resisting the authorities you are resisting God and that will have penalties.

Third- vs3 in general they are rewarding what God wants and punishing what he doesn't

Fourth- vs4 they are ministers of God and whether rewarding or punishing they are doing what God wants.

Fifth- vs 5 they play a part in God's plan in this world

Sixth- vs 6 they are servants of God for your behalf

Seventh- vs 7 this honor is due to them. Their position and work deserves it.

For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Look at this closely. There is no authority except from God. Do you understand what this means? The authority for civil government arises from God. In fact, apart from God and his rule, there really is no authority that exists.

Mankind might think that they came up with civil authority, but they didn't. God knew that the presence of sin in mankind would absolutely require that authority was present to punish evil and reward good. There had to be law and there had to be law enforcement.

I know this is not something I think about much. I **don't consider** that the police officers we have represent something very good. They represent the protection of those who are minding their own business from those who intend others harm.

This is representative of God, it is carrying out His wishes. And that authority was not created by man. It was created by God to be carried out by civil authorities. Now notice that it does not say that only the civil authorities of democratic governments were appointed by God. No. Kings, Prime Ministers, Presidents, take your pick. It doesn't matter. All of them govern sinful people and all of them have the appointed authority of punishing wickedness and protecting life.

2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Logically Paul goes on. It stands to reason that if God set this whole system of civil authorities to protect life, then if we are resisting it, who are we resisting? Well we are resisting God and the rule of God. We need to see the state for what it is from God's perspective.

But you might say, look at our government. Look at how they are abusing the power. Look how they are exploiting those they are supposed to serve. Look at the corruption and incompetence and abuse of power. Yep. It is all true. This passage is not saying anything about how this God given authority can be abused. It does not touch on that. That is not the intent of this passage. In fact I make a mental note before verse 3 that this passage is describing God's authority properly carried out. Verses 1-7 are mostly endorsing the fact that the whole system of civil government has God's fingerprints on it.

We may point out the abuses. We might draw attention to the wrongs. We may do those things readily in our power to right some wrongs. But none of that removes the fact that the authority for civil government comes from God. It is much like marriage isn't it. Did God create marriage? Of course he did. But look how people abuse it. Should we throw out marriage? Of course not. Its authority comes straight from God. But we may have to minister to those in those positions to carry out their positions properly.

When we resist the true authority of the civil government when they are carrying out their God given duty, we are resisting God Himself. That is part of what this verse is telling us. Even if we don't like a law, if it fits into the government's duty to its people we must not resist it in any way. I don't know about you but that is hard on me. There are plenty of things I WANT to resist. But here Paul makes it clear what we must NOT resist.

Now what does it mean, **“we will bring judgment upon ourselves if we resist the authority?”**

I believe that this is not talking about eternal judgment, but the judgment that comes to anyone who resists the civil government.

Now keep in mind this was written to a mixture of Jews and gentiles at Rome. And keep in mind that the Jews had a tendency to be extremely nationalistic. And that was an easy thing to get wrong, based on the promises of the Old Testament. So they frequently interpreted God's promises to themselves as a nation. And they had a tendency to feel like they were **selling out** or being disloyal to God when they accepted any other civil authority over them. So wanting to rebel against the government and overthrow the chains of the current government was always a temptation to them. And frequently the Jewish Christians would be the teachers to the Gentile Christians because the Jewish believers knew the Old Testament much better. So Paul may have in mind here a warning about becoming involved in any government revolutions. They were not to revolt against the government.

Now based on the OT history, what always happened when the Jews revolted against their captors? They were always punished. That is what can be expected when we resist the government. Oh, it may vary in degrees, but if you resist the government there will be a price to pay. And more than likely you will pay it. You will be punished.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

Again it is important to keep in mind that this is not addressing all potential **expressions** of authority. This is not addressing **abuses of authority**. What is being described is what these people were being given authority **for**. This is how authority from God is **supposed to be** expressed. Those positions can be used as much for evil as for good, but when the positions best represent God's authority, this is what happens.

Tell me this. Were you ever afraid that your mom or dad would catch you doing the dishes? Or cleaning your room? Or doing your chores? No. Of course not. But how about watching something on the tv you weren't supposed to? Or eating something you were told not to eat. You get the picture. This is common sense. Civil authority, when properly carried out, makes bad guys scared and peaceful citizens glad. So, do you want to be glad in the face of the civil government? Then do good things. And generally that will win you favor with civil government authorities.

Now, people in Laos know this does not always work. They will be **punished** for good things, like telling their neighbors about Christ. In Iran doing good things may get you killed. Again, this is not meant to be a universal statement about all expressions of civil government. But even in those countries, it is generally true that if you mug someone or steal from someone or kill someone, the government is going to do something bad to you.

Even at its worst, the Soviet Union did crack down pretty hard on murder and theft and crimes against its people... except of course if it were the government that was doing the crimes. But do you see what I mean? Even the worst examples of governments often do much of what is expected of civil governments.

4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Now, look at this. This is how we are supposed to view civil servants. They are ministers to us. Oh, they aren't bringing us the gospel or spiritual help most times. But they are bringing us other things we really need. They are bringing us safety and justice and protection. When you walk through Oakland, are you afraid? No. We generally feel pretty safe. We don't even think about it. Well you can thank your local and county and state law enforcement officers for that. But those same agents will not be good to us if we are active in evil deeds. Then we should be afraid. We would be smart to be afraid. Why? They truly **do have power**. And how far does that power extend? It extends to taking away a person's life. That is what the power of the sword means.

You see in places like Israel under Roman rule, the local leaders had some authorities. But they were never given the power of the sword. They could never take a person's life. But the civil servants of Rome **had that power** and they often used it.

Notice the wording here. These ministers are said to avenge and to execute wrath on evil. See how well this ties in with Chapter 12 where **we, as individuals**, were told **not to take revenge**. This is a very important distinction. The civil government **has** the authority to take a person's life.

Now there are Christians who rally to remove the death penalty, but they cannot stand on scripture to say that the government does not have the right to take a life. So they must resort to other reasoning.

What do you think of when you hear “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”? Don’t you immediately think – that is harsh. Maybe it’s just me. That is how I respond internally. But in studying for this sermon I saw the other side of that statement. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is truly **justice**. It is a **limitation** of the penalty that a person might get for harm they did to another. England used to have the death penalty for all kinds of crimes, including stealing another person’s sheep. That is not justice. The only time a life should be taken is when **another person’s life** was taken, in one form or another. And there is plenty of that going on. Civil governments should be involved in implementing justice. That is what they have the sword for.

I would like to expand on some points that RC Sproul brought out here.

He brings out some teaching by Augustine who points out that the first law enforcement officer was an angel at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. And what was his job? He yielded the sword to restrain evil. It would not have been good for Adam and Eve to exist continually in their state of sin. So they were cut off from access to the tree of life. If you follow that logic, you end up with the fact that the **first responsibility of government is to preserve, maintain and promote human life**. So governments exist to make the continuity of life possible.

So his point is that the basis for the existence of the authority given to civil governments is to yield a sword to, in essence, protect life. This sword is not to be used arbitrarily. It is for a specific purpose.

So, if a police officer comes upon a person who’s life is being threatened, can he use his gun to protect that person, even if it means taking another person’s life? Absolutely. That is appropriate if it is required.

Ok. Then let’s extend that to war. Is it ok for a Christian to enter a war in which they are likely to take human life?

Now we already understand that if a person were to be sighting his rifle in on the people in a retirement village, that would be unrestrained evil. So murder is wrong. But what about war?

This is where Mr. Sproul talks about the just war argument.

If the US were to enter Mexico to kill its people so it could take its land, that would be, in essence, simply murder that is performed by a country instead of an individual. That would not be a cause that is just. So any lives taken in that pursuit, even if done under the name of the US, would be evil. It would be an unjust war, and not one a Christian should be part of.

But if this same action were being performed by Cuba, and we could see a crime was being committed against a nation that is innocent of inciting that crime, then for **our** civil government to use the sword to protect the innocent people of **that country** would be a just war. It is a **good reason** for a government to use the sword. It is being used to protect life. And it would be appropriate for us as citizens of our land to be agents of the sword to protect life.

I think this is very solid reasoning, although in **our world** it is getting harder and harder to know who truly has a just cause.

Anyway, all of this stems from the truth that God has given the civil government the authority to execute justice and to take life when it is appropriate.

The agents of the state are here to **execute wrath on him who practices evil.**

I don't look for that to be an emblem any time soon on the police officer's badge.

"to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

But that is their proper purpose according to God's word.

So the question in application for us this morning is "are we willing to submit ourselves to our civil authorities?" "Will we choose to see them as they are described in scripture?" Will we take God's word for it? Will we see them as God sees them? I know it will take some adjustment in **my** mind. I suspect it might to some of you as well.

We will continue with this topic next week Lord willing.