

ALTARED STATE "CIVIL SERVITUDE" ROMANS 13:1-7

Nowhere do idealism and pragmatism clash heads more than around the subject of Christians' responsibilities to government—more, perhaps, in other parts of the world than in America. Ideally, Christians are committed to submit to "the higher powers" (KJV), but practically, government bureaucracy and wrong-headed rules get in the way. In the first place, seemingly excessive regulations sometimes fly in the face of Christian ministry. For example, congregations in one European country desiring to remodel a space for church use—often in an apartment building or retail facility—must comply with strict zoning requirements and ostensibly unreasonable building codes that add significantly to the cost and time required for construction, often making it nearly prohibitive. Here's what Carlos Trujillo, our ministry partner in Barajas, had to say about his experience in Spain:

In typical Spain fashion, our approval and permits from the city for the new church location have just come through. What we were told would take a few weeks has instead taken over 3 months! . . . Along with the city permits, we were given strict guidelines for the types of renovations we must complete to bring the building up to code for it to be used as a church. One major regulation is the soundproofing. While we knew that soundproofing would be a necessity, what we didn't know was that the city would require us to install a very high level of soundproofing—a

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— Douglas J. Moo

level equal to that of a nightclub! In addition, the city is requiring that we upgrade the ventilation system and build an entryway with a second door—more expenses we were not expecting. As a result, our original renovation estimate has easily doubled. In order to bring the building up to code, we will need to spend around 20,000 euros (or about \$22,500). To keep costs down as much as possible, we are planning on completing the work ourselves.

In the second place, seemingly unscrupulous government practices sometimes involve questionable behavior. For example, congregations in one Asian country seeking government approval of spaces for church use or of ministry-related educational programs may be expected to pay added "fees" to cut through the red tape. Our ministry partners in Bangalore routinely face this kind of thing.

Some would be tempted to simply evade compliance with what are deemed unreasonable demands of government, but Paul teaches otherwise in Romans 13. If Paul expected Christians in Rome to "be subject to the governing authorities," how much more in democratic countries like America where citizens have a say in their government?

This Week's Core Competency

Self-Control – I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

According to Titus 2:12, Christians are to "live self-controlled, upright and godly lives" in this present age. Paul says much the same thing in Romans 12. In verse 9 he tells his readers to abhor doing evil and embrace doing good (v. 9), to avoid retaliating and seeking revenge (vv. 17, 18), and to overcome evil done to them by doing good to their persecutors (vv. 14, 20, 21). His instructions in chapter 13, which speak to the Christian's civic responsibility, naturally

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follow. One commentator writes: "It is possible to see in 13:1-7 an expansion and special application of the teaching about good and evil (12:17, 21) and living 'at peace with everyone' (12:18) . . . [more specifically] Paul may be intent on warning the Roman church, which contained some Christian Jews as well as Gentile believers who sympathized with them over the plight of their nation, not to identify with any revolutionary movement advocating rebellion against Rome" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, 10:136).

Self-control is a virtue; it connotes refraining from bad behavior on the one hand and engaging in good behavior on the other. In Romans 13:1-5, Paul instructs Christians to "be subject to the governing authorities" (v. 1) and "to submit to authorities" (v. 5)—an example of good behavior for sure. In the intervening verses, he explains in no uncertain terms why this must be the case. His outspoken language raises a question as to whether Christians are to always, regardless of circumstances, obey whatever their governmental leaders tell them to do. Of the many ways interpreters try to avoid the conclusion that they are, two seem more likely. The *first* suggests that Paul demands submission to government only if it functions as Paul says government should. If it rewards good and punishes evil, it deserves to be obeyed, but if it does the opposite, it doesn't. In that case, Christians are free to disobey it. The *second*, which is more likely, points out that Paul demands "submission" rather than "obedience." A proponent of this view writes: "In most cases, Christian submission to government will involve obeying what government tells the Christian to do. But government does not have absolute right over the believer, for government, like every human institution, is subordinate to God himself . . . This means, then, that Christians may continue to 'submit' to a particular government (acknowledging their subordination to it generally) even as they, in obedience to a 'higher' authority, refuse to do, in a given instance, what that government requires" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 809). Of course, in such situations where Christian convictions do not permit compliance, believers must accept the consequences of their civil disobedience, that is, their exercise of self-control.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 13:1-7

1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do

wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight "Let everyone be subject to" in v. 1 and "it is necessary to submit to" in v. 5.
- * Circle "governing authorities" in v. 1.
- * Circle "established" in v. 1.
- * Box "consequently" indicating *result* in v. 2.
- * Circle "judgment" in v. 2.

- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 3, 4, 5.
- * Bracket "bear the sword" in v. 4.
- * Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 5.
- * Underline "taxes" and "revenue" in v. 7.
- * Double underline "respect" and "honor" in v. 7.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul tells Christians in Rome, the seat of the empire's government, to "be subject to the governing authorities." Why might they be tempted to do otherwise?

2. He tells them to "be subject" rather than "obey." Does it matter? Explain.

3. Why "be subject" to these authorities?

4. Paul speaks of "judgment" in verse 2. Whose judgment?

5. He speaks of doing "right" and doing "wrong" in verse 3. Explain what he means.

6. In what sense are governing authorities *God's servants*?

7. Is it necessary to submit (v. 5) to corrupt civil authorities?

8. Put what "matter of conscience" (v. 5) means in your own words.

9. **Discussion:** Talk about Paul's reason for paying taxes (v. 6) and whether it still applies today.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Christians are dual citizens. We are citizens in heaven (Phil 3:20) and citizens on earth. Romans 13:1-7 doesn't tell us everything we need to know about our responsibilities as Christians and Americans, but Paul does tell us one important thing. Just because we are citizens of heaven doesn't mean we no longer have responsibilities as citizens on earth. Paul is writing to Christians living in Washington, DC, so to speak, concerning their responsibility to government authorities. Regarding their historical and cultural context, one commentator writes: "Little gatherings of Christians, living in the capital city, without political power, dependent on the good will of the authorities, who could be very arbitrary and unpredictable in their rulings regarding minority ethnic or religious groups, were only acting prudently if they sought to avoid giving any cause for offense. Paul states it as an exhortation not so much because his readers might think otherwise, but rather because *the recent history of Jews in Rome* made them that much more vulnerable. Paul's reminder is, in effect, to say: since you cannot change the terms under which you live, and since your position is already hazardous, remember the political realities of the politically powerless and live accordingly" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38b, *Romans 9-16*, 770 italics added). The writer is alluding to the relatively recent expulsion of Jews, including Jewish Christians, under Claudius in A.D. 49 (cf., Ac 18:2), instigated by rioting in the synagogues over the preaching of Christ. By the time Paul writes Romans in A.D. 56/57, Nero has permitted the Jews to return to the city. Jewish Christians returned to Gentile congregations where together they lived in peace until the emperor's persecution of Christians began three years later (see Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 305-308). Gentile Christians who welcomed Jewish Christians into their house churches after Claudius died in A.D. 54 and his banishment edict lapsed put their congregations under the special scrutiny.

Paul's argument in verses 1-7 unfolds logically. First, he gives a general command, "be subject to

governing authorities" (v. 1a), followed by reasons for obeying it. Then, he reiterates the command, "it is necessary to submit to the authorities" (v. 5), followed by abbreviated reasons for obeying it. Finally, he concludes by summarizing why they pay taxes and commanding them to pay their taxes and to respect the authorities. The following comment captures the essence of the apostle's appeal: "All that is asked of the readers is that they 'do good,' 'pay taxes,' and 'honor and respect those in power.' All that is legitimately ascribed to the authorities is punishing the evil and rewarding the good. This limited homage is far from an enthusiastic endorsement of the empire" (Charles C. Talbert, *Romans*, SHBC, 296).

Regarding the first reason for obeying his command, Paul writes: "for there is no authority except that which God has established," that is, "the authorities that exist have been established by God" (v. 1b, c). Put differently, government with its various positions of authority and by implication the ones in those positions are ordained by God. This does not preclude the possibility, however, that some government authorities may be tyrants, who reward evil and suppress good. At the beginning of Nero's rule there was widespread hope that he would keep the peace and govern wisely, fairly, and justly. Consequently, whoever rebels against the governing authorities invites God's judgment, administered by those very authorities on his behalf (v. 2). Regarding the second reason, Paul says rulers are God's servants to reward good and punish evil (vv. 3-4): "They are God's servants working for your own good" (v. 3). "They are God's servants and carry out God's punishment on those who do evil" (v. 4). The two reasons given following the reiteration are: the possibility of punishment and conscience (v. 5). So, although certain taxes may be onerous, Christians are to pay them. What's more, they are to honor those who collect them, as well as all others in authority to whom honor is due. Paul purposes to explain the general rule rather than identify its exceptions.

The Message of the Passage

*Knowing it's the right thing to do and what can happen if they don't,
Christians are to be subject to governing authorities because
they have been established by God and are his servants
to reward good and punish evil.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

According to one commentator, Paul's advice is simple: "If you do not want to live in fear, do not buck the system." Would you agree?

According to another commentator, Paul is exhorting Christians to practice "benefaction," that is, work for the benefit of the community to increase respect for the church. What do you think?

Under what circumstances would you refuse to obey the law?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **be subject** "Here and in v. 5 he seems to avoid using the stronger word 'obey,' and the reason is that the believer may find it impossible to comply with every demand of the government. A circumstance may arise in which he must choose between obeying God and obeying men (Acts 5:30). But even then he must be submissive to the extent that, if his Christian convictions do not permit his compliance, he will accept the consequences of his refusal" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10:136-37).

"Paul does not counsel blind obedience" (Witherington, 312). "To submit is to recognize one's subordinate place in a hierarchy, to acknowledge as a general rule that certain people or institutions have 'authority' over us . . . It is this general posture toward government that Paul demands here of Christians. And such a posture will usually demand that we obey what the governing authorities tell us to do. But perhaps our submission to government is compatible with disobedience to government in certain exceptional circumstances. For heading the hierarchy of relations in which Christians find themselves is God; and all subordinate 'submissions' must always be measured in relationship to our all-embracing submission to him" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 797).

v. 1 **governing authorities** This translation is found in several other versions (NKJV, NASV, NET); cf., "state authorities" (TEV), "civil authorities" (Phillips), "government authorities" (Moffatt). Although some have argued Paul is referring to angelic powers behind and acting through political authorities, Bruce correctly writes: "In the present context the 'powers' appear to be human rulers, who wield 'the sword' for the punishment of wickedness and the protection of the good, who therefore command and should receive obedience, and who are to be paid appropriate taxes and other dues, together with fitting reverence and honour" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 236).

v. 1 **established** Cf., Pr 8:15-16; Wisd of Sol 6:3. "Paul's teaching that no ruler wields power except through God's appointment reflects standard OT and Jewish teaching. Daniel tells the proud pagan king Nebuchadnezzar that God was teaching him that 'the Most High is sovereign over the kingdom of mortals; he gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of human beings' (4:17)" (Moo, 798; see Dunn, 761).

v. 2 **judgment** The following statement in verse 3 indicates this is probably a reference to penal judgment administered by the governing authorities (cf., vv. 4, 5). "From the movement of thought, the judgment is to be conceived of as coming from God in the sense of bearing his approval, even though administered through human channels and in the sphere of human affairs" (Harrison, 137).

v. 4 **bear the sword** "Paul uses the phrase to refer generally to the right of the government to punish those who violate its laws. For the purpose of his argument at this point, Paul is assuming that the laws of the state embody those general moral principles that are taught in the word of God. The 'evil' that the civil authorities punish, therefore, is evil in the absolute sense: those acts that God himself condemns as evil. Only if this is so can we explain how Paul can see the government's use of the sword as a manifestation of its role as 'God servant'" (Moo, 802).

v. 5 **conscience** "This means not 'because if you don't, you will feel guilty,' but that critical moral reflection of a positive sort will reveal that it is the right thing to do" (Witherington, 315). "The Christian, by virtue of divine revelation, can have a clearer understanding of the position of the governing authority than an official of the government is likely to have. Let that knowledge guide him in his attitudes and decisions. This usage of the word 'conscience' is found again in 1 Peter 2:19" (Harrison, 139).

v. 7 **taxes, revenue** The word for 'taxes' means tribute paid to a foreign ruler (it appears in Luke 20:22 in the incident concerning paying tribute to Caesar). 'Revenue' pertains to indirect taxation in the form of toll or customs duties. It forms a part of the word for tax gatherer (*telones*, Matt 10:3)" (Harrison, 140). Indirect taxes were collected by Roman "knights," and were more subject to abuse. Direct taxes were collected by proper government officials. "Nero had promised to abolish indirect taxes because of the abuses, but his advisor did not let him do so, which led to some general consternation. There were even open protests in Rome about such taxes when Paul wrote this letter. So Paul seeks to temper such sentiments among the converts in Rome, lest they draw negative attention to themselves" (Witherington, 315).

v. 7 **respect, honor** "'Respect' is defined by Liddon as 'the profound veneration due to the highest persons in the state.' He characterizes 'honor' as 'respect due to all who hold public offices' (in loc.). It is just possible, however, that Paul intends the former term to God, in which case it should be translated 'fear' (cf. 1 Peter 2:17, where it is used in relation to God and in contrast to honor paid the supreme earthly ruler)" (140).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Every so often I ask my kids to stop what they're doing and get ready to run a quick errand. Inevitably I hear all the complaints: "Why?", "What are we doing?", "Do I have to?", "I don't want to!" Secretly, all I want to do is surprise them with a fun trip down to the local ice cream shop. A quick trip to grab ice cream suddenly becomes a lesson in obedience. My kids can't see the big picture. If they knew ice cream was in their future their behavior would switch from complaining to celebration. What they see is they have to stop doing something they're enjoying for what they think is a boring mom-errand. Aren't we all like our kids, resisting authority for what works best for ourselves? God calls us to live differently, submitting to authority with honor and respect. God picked you to be your child's parent. He put you in authority over your child because He sees the big picture. Establishing this authority feels like this is a day-by-day, minute-by-minute challenge. Teaching our kids to respect and honor our authority as parents is an excellent training ground for learning how to respect and honor God as the ultimate authority. Parents, I'm praying for you this week as you establish and model a healthy respect for authority in your home, that your child has a heart of obedience, and you're able to spend more time in discipleship than discipline.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 13:1-7

1. Who gives those in authority their power?
2. What are two reasons we should submit to authority?

What Do You Think

What do you think would happen if there was no authority at home, school, church, sports, government? How would that be different from your life today?

What R U Going To Do

Think of five people in authority. What specific thing can you do to honor and respect them this week?

Core Comp

Self-Control – Taking charge of myself with Jesus' help

Memory Verse

Romans 12:3 – For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.