

BE SUBJECT TO THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES – ROMANS 13:1-7

Before properly interpreting this passage, one must understand the context in which it was written. What was the cultural context at the time? What was Paul's personal witness and track record regarding engagement with the government? What was the primary issue being addressed?

CONTEXT in the flow of Romans

Last half of chapter 12 cites the "Marks of a True Christian"

- "...repay no one evil for evil" (v.17)
- "...live peaceably with all" (v.18)
- "...never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God" (v.19)
- "...overcome evil with good" (v.21)

Paul was speaking to the Church about their responses to evil. Realizing the persecution they were facing from rulers and authorities, he was setting the foundation in Christian conduct.

CONTEXT of the CULTURE:

- NOT a Democracy where people voted!
 - There was no concept of the Jews having "rights" or any kind of choice.
 - Kings and rulers were always selected through bloodline, the casting of lots, or a word of prophecy.
 - The Jews only knew a culture where the ruler was chosen by others.

CONTEXT of the WRITER

Remember who PAUL WAS (Was he simply saying OBEY YOUR GOVERNMENT!?)

- The Apostle Paul writes as a first-century citizen residing within the Roman Empire under NERO. Nero would execute Paul 7 years later.
- Paul was a bold defender of the faith, speaking TRUTH TO POWER.
 - He held the magistrates to account for secretly throwing him in prison unjustly and demanded a public apology (Acts 16:35-37).
 - Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship to avert flogging (Acts 22:25-29).
 - He called on Roman officials to protect his life when the Jews arrested him (Acts 23:12-35).
 - He appealed to Caesar for justice rather than leave his case in the hands of Jews (Acts 25).
- He knew the laws of the land and consistently held the rulers to account.
- *This passage IS NOT about blindly obeying wicked rulers.*

CONTEXT of the ISSUE BEING ADDRESSED:

- Paul was establishing God's ultimate authority in Government.
- He establishes Government as an institution ordained and created by God, not man.

- He is laying a BLUEPRINT for the long term – HOW it should work and WHY.
- He is answering the question concerning one of the FUNCTIONS of Government – WHY the people had to PAY TAXES.
 - Jesus was asked that same question (Matt 22:21)

With a proper understanding of the context, read this passage as a first-century Jew and not a twenty-first century American.

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's **servant** for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the **servant** of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are **ministers** of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

Verse 1: THERE IS NO AUTHORITY APART FROM GOD

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

- God has ultimate authority over every authority on the earth.
- He has ordained Governing Rulers to PREVENT ANARCHY and CHAOS.
 - Authority is necessary to maintain a peaceful society.
 - Those who call for the destruction of civil authorities are fueling the spirit of lawlessness (Matthew 24:12).
 - Without God, leaders will rule with threats, control, manipulation, etc.
 - Rulers/leaders who ACKNOWLEDGE God's authority will lead with favor
 - President Trump has stated we are a nation under God.

Verse 2: EVERY LEADER MUST GIVE AN ACCOUNT TO GOD

Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

- He is speaking about the INSTITUTION of Government.
- He is also reminding THE RULERS WHO they have to give account to!
 - Jesus did this.

So Pilate said to Him, "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:10-11).

- Throughout biblical history, God used wicked rulers as well as good rulers for His purposes.
 - Sometimes, it was to discipline the nation, causing them to cry out for God. (Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Pharaoh, Saul)
 - Sometimes, to spawn revival in the land. (David, Solomon, Hezekiah)
 - His purpose is ultimately to MATURE US.
 - 2012 election of Obama to his second term was used to awaken a sleeping church – *"The Church isn't ready to steward what I want to give them."*
 - Daniel 2:21 - *"He changes the times and seasons; he deposes kings and establishes kings."*
 - Luke 1:52 - *He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."*

Verses 3-4: RULERS ARE GOD'S SERVANTS FOR OUR GOOD

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

In this passage, it mentions 3 TIMES that governing rulers are GOD'S SERVANTS/MINISTERS.

- These are leaders God uses for the good of the people. "Public servants!"
- Job description: Reward those who do good. Punish those who do wrong.
- For the purpose of instilling a fear of disobedience within those who have no fear of God.
 - There must be consequences of wrong doing.
- The Government is NOT the Church. Civil rulers are not required to extend mercy.
 - President Trump is fulfilling his role (regardless of his controversial rhetoric and limited spiritual depth).
- Government will not teach biblical doctrine or morality. That's the Church's job.

Proverbs 29:2 – When the godly are in authority, the people rejoice. But when the wicked are in power, the people groan.

Power is like money in the Bible. It is morally neutral. It's how you USE power that is either good or bad.

Verse 5: BE SUBJECT TO - BUT NOT OBEY IN ALL

Therefore one must be in subjection (Strong's Concordance Greek 5293), not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. (Let every person be subject...)

Difference in “subject,” “submit” and “obey.”

1 Peter 2:13-17

Be subject (5293) for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor (king).

- “Submit” (5293) = “a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility as a subordinate.” TO THE INSTITUTION/OFFICE.

Titus 3:1-2

Remind them to **be submissive (5293)** to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

- “Rulers and authorities” represents a collective – the institution.
- Acknowledge their place in giving oversight to the general populace.

Ephesians 5:24-26

Now as the church submits (5293) to Christ, so also wives should **submit in everything** to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word

The framework for submission in the New Testament is based on Christ’s love and sacrifice for the Church. It is defined within the context of PERFECT LOVE.

- As the Church, we submit to Christ because of LOVE.
 - Husbands have been given responsibility to BE LIKE CHRIST - set the example!
 - GIVEN THAT KIND OF LOVE/OVERSIGHT, wives can yield to/submit to their husbands with the assurance they will be loved, protected, and covered.
 - Husbands – your leverage is ONLY AS GOOD as your demonstration of Christ’s love for your Bride.
- IN EVERYTHING? In the CONTEXT OF Perfect Love!
- Why does the Church submit to Christ? Out of love. We know it’s for our good and blessing.

CONCLUSION: We SUBMIT to Rulers because God has given them charge.

BUT – In Romans 13, we are NOT told to Submit IN EVERYTHING. (Christ is central)

Colossians 3:20-22

Children, obey (5219) your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

“Obey” (5219) = “to harken to a command.”

- Obedience is necessary for safety and protection.
- Neither “obey” or “everything” is used in Romans 13.

Hebrews 13:17

(Church leaders) Obey your leaders and submit (5226) to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

“Submit” (5226) – yield, do not resist

- Context of believers collectively submitting to Christ and His blueprint for leadership.

In these verses, being “subject to” someone acknowledges God’s purpose in using these institutions and leaders to guard, protect, and care for those they are responsible to

However, to be subject to Civil Rulers and Authorities DOES NOT MEAN we are required to OBEY THEM in EVERYTHING.

- Peter and the apostles were charged with preaching the gospel and they disobeyed:

“We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:28-29).

- Whenever the LOWER LAW of man conflicts with the HIGHER LAW of God, a believer is FREE TO DISOBEY. Even required to.
- Also, whenever your conscience is VIOLATED (by obeying civil authorities).
 - Wearing masks when they were mandated violated the conscience of some. (They were willing to face the consequences).
 - We must carefully feed our conscience so that it can properly guide us.
- Biblical examples of civil disobedience:
 - Exodus 1: Pharaoh dictated all baby boys to be executed. The midwives refused.

- Daniel 3: Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone to bow to his idol. The 3 Hebrews boys disobeyed (suffered the consequence – came out without the smell of smoke!)
- Daniel 6: The king's decree forbidding prayer to any other god. Daniel disobeyed but was saved from the lion's den.
- Acts 5: Peter and John disobeyed the authorities and proclaimed the gospel.
- Matthew 14: John the Baptist openly rebuked King Herod for his unlawful marriage to his brother's wife. In holding the ruler to account, John lost his head.
- Apostle Paul boldly spoke to kings and rulers the truths of the Kingdom, regardless of the cost.

We are instructed to submit to the institutions God has ordained, but our ultimate allegiance is to God and His Word. We have clear scriptural grounds to hold our leaders to account for their God-given charge. At times, we may even defy their orders if they require us to disobey God.

Verse 6-7 – GIVE WHAT IS OWED

*For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are **ministers** of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

- Taxes – supports the work of keeping the peace
- Revenue – money paid for customs, exports, properties, etc. To finance the institution.
- Respect – “holy fear” - respect their roles and duties given.
- Honor – Value due the office, role, or authority
- The world is watching how we respond to Government.
- Will we be like Paul and John the Baptist in speaking TRUTH TO POWER?
- Will we hold leaders to account?

HOW DO ENACT THESE PRINCIPLES?

- Acknowledge the role of government as an institution GOD has ordained.
- Feed your conscience with the Word of God and know your rights as a citizen.
- Know the boundaries of governmental oversight with a readiness to obey God rather than men.
- Honor the duties of civil rulers in a culture that does not fear God.
- Use your VOICE and VOTE. Take ownership of our collective charge in setting the standard.

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