

ENGAGE

- I will be spending a few weeks on godly leadership. Not simply in assessing others in how they measure up to Christ's teaching on leadership, but a personal assessment of how we operate as godly leaders in our homes, jobs, and communities.

EXAMINE

Romans 13:1- 7

A Christian's Obligation to Government

A. The Christian and government.

1. (1-2) Government's legitimate authority and the Christian's response.

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

- a. Subject to the governing authorities:** The connection between Romans 12 and Romans 13 is clear. If the Christian is not to seek personal vengeance, it does not take away the government's authority to punish wrongdoers.
- b. Every soul:** This certainly includes Christians. Paul simply says that we should be **subject** to the governing authorities. This was in contrast to groups of zealous Jews in that day who recognized no king but God and paid taxes to no one but God.
- c. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God:** We subject ourselves to governing authorities because they are appointed by God and serve a purpose in His plan.
 - i. No authority except from God:** God appoints a nation's leaders, but not always to *bless* the people. Sometimes it is to judge the people or to ripen the nation for judgment.
 - ii.** We remember that Paul wrote this during the reign of the Roman Empire. It was no democracy, and no special friend to Christians – yet he still saw their legitimate authority.
 - iii.** "Your Savior suffered under Pontius Pilate, one of the worst Roman governors Judea ever had; and Paul under Nero, the worst Roman Emperor. And neither our Lord nor His Apostle denied or reviled the 'authority!'" (Newell)
- d. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God:** Since governments have authority from God, we are bound to obey them – unless, of course, they order us to do something in contradiction to God's law. Then, we are commanded to obey God before man (as in Acts 4:19).

e. **Those who resist will bring judgment on themselves:** God uses governing authorities as a check upon man's sinful desires and tendencies. Government can be an effective tool in resisting the effects of man's fallenness.

2. (3-4) The job of government: to punish and deter evildoers.

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. 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.

a. **Do what is good, and you will have praise:** Paul's idea is that Christians should be the best citizens of all. Even though they are loyal to God before they are loyal to the state, Christians are good citizens because they are honest, give no trouble to the state, pay their taxes, and – most importantly – pray for the state and the rulers.

b. **He is God's minister:** Paul describes government officials as **God's minister**. They have a ministry in the plan and administration of God, just as much as church leaders do.

i. If the state's rulers are **God's minister** (servant), they should remember that they are *only* servants, and not gods themselves.

c. **An avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil:** It is through the just punishment of evil that government serves its function in God's plan of holding man's sinful tendencies in check. When a government fails to do this consistently, it opens itself up to God's judgment and correction.

d. **He does not bear the sword in vain:** **The sword** is a reference to capital punishment. In the Roman Empire, criminals were typically executed by beheading with a **sword** (crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals of the lowest classes). Paul, speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has no doubt that the state has the legitimate authority to execute criminals.

3. (5-7) The Christian's responsibility towards government.

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

a. **Therefore you must be subject:** We must be subject to government; not only because we fear punishment, but because we know it is right before God to do so.

i. **For conscience sake:** Christian obedience to the state is never blind – it obeys with the eyes of conscience wide open.

b. **You also pay taxes... Render therefore to all their due:** We are also to pay the taxes **due** from us, because there is a sense in which we support *God's work* when we do so.

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Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13; Daniel 2:21-23

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i. By implication, Romans 13:6 also says that the taxes collected are to be used by government to get the job done of restraining evil and keeping an orderly society – not to enrich the government officials themselves.

c. **Taxes... customs... fear... honor:** We are to give to the state the money, honor, and proper reverence which are due to the state, all the while reserving our right to give to God that which is due to God alone (Matthew 22:21).

d. In light of this, is rebellion against government ever justified? If a citizen has a choice between two governments, it is right to choose and to promote the one that is most legitimate in God's eyes – the one which will best fulfill God's purpose for governments.

i. In a democracy we understand that there is a sense in which we *are* the government, and should not hesitate to help "govern" our democracy through our participation in the democratic process.

Daniel 2:21-23

21 He changes times and seasons;
he deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.

22 He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.

23 I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king."

2:21 And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings;

God is in control of human history. He makes and unmakes kings. God sovereignly controls human events. God will lead human history to its climax. God has a plan for creation. He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding.

Daniel identifies two evidences of God's wisdom:

- 1) He gives wisdom to the wise, and
- 2) He gives knowledge to those who have understanding.

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2:22 He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him.

We see God's wisdom in revelation. "Light dwells with Him" because He sees all things clearly. There are no shades of meaning or possibilities in Him. Man is in the dark because he is limited in his understanding. God is omniscient.

2:23 I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand.

Now Daniel specifies that it was God who gave him wisdom. The revelation he received came from God, not from his own wisdom. He fully recognized that it was God who gave him everything he knew.

1 Peter 2:13

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man

Or, "to every human creation", or "creature"; not to "all the sons of men", as the Syriac version renders it; or to all the individuals of mankind; for there are some that are in such stations and circumstances, that they are not to be submitted to, but to be ruled over, and governed: so kings are not to submit to their subjects, nor are parents to be subject to their children, nor husbands to their wives, nor masters to their servants, which would be preposterous; but submission is limited and restrained to persons in such a place and situation: "the human creature", or "creation", here designs the Gentiles, who are elsewhere called the creature, the whole creation, every creature, and every creature under heaven, (Romans 8:19-22) (Mark 16:15) (Colossians 1:23) and particularly Heathen magistrates, styled creation, or creature: not as men, for all men, as such, are creatures; but as magistrates, being created, constituted, and appointed such, and installed into, and invested with such an office: and "human"; not only because they were men, and were taken out from among men that bore the office of magistrates, and governed over men, and were for the good and advantage of mankind, but because they were created and placed in such a station by men; though government itself is of God, is a divine institution, yet this and that particular form of government is of man; and especially the forms of government among the Gentiles were human; and are here so called, in distinction from the form of government among the Jews, which was a theocracy, and was divine; wherefore the Jews, and so these converted ones, scrupled yielding obedience to Heathen magistrates; on which account they were spoken against, as evildoers; hence the apostle, in the first place, and as a principal part of their honest conversation among the Gentiles, exhorts them to submission to civil magistrates, though they were creatures of men; and to everyone of them, though a Gentile, an unbeliever, and a wicked man: and this he urges,

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...for the Lord's sake;

for the sake of Christ Jesus the Lord, because of his command, who ordered to give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and in imitation of him, who paid tribute to whom tribute was due; and for the sake of his honour and glory, who was ill thought and spoken of by the Gentiles, because of the disregard of the converted Jews to their magistrates; and which served to prejudice them against Christ and his Gospel: the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions, read, "for God's sake"; because civil government is of God; magistracy is of divine appointment; the powers that he are ordained of God, though this or the other form is of man's prescription: it is the command of God that magistrates should be obeyed; and it makes for his glory, as well as for the good of men, when they are submitted to in things that do not contradict the revealed will of God; for otherwise, not man, but God, is to be obeyed:

...whether it be to the king;

to Caesar, the Roman emperor; and the then reigning one seems to be Nero, who, though a wicked man, was to be submitted to in things civil and lawful; and it holds good of any other king that has the supreme government of a nation: the Syriac version reads it in the plural number, "to kings"; and though the name of king was odious to the Romans, from the times of Tarquin, nor did they call their chief governor, or governors, by this name, yet other nations did; see (John 19:15) and subjection was to be yielded to him, "as supreme"; for the sake, and in consideration of his being in so high and exalted a station, having the supreme power and government of the people in his hands. The Syriac version renders it, "because of their power"; and the Arabic version, "because of his power"; and the Ethiopic version, "because all things are his"; the Roman emperors were absolute monarchs;

QUESTIONS

Romans 13:1

- What is the instruction in v1?
- Why should believers submit to governing authorities, according to v1?
- What conclusion does Paul make in v 2?
- What does Paul teach us about 'rulers' in vv3-4?
- What conclusions does Paul draw in v5-7?

1 Pet 4:12-19

- What was Peter's exhortation?
- What are examples of how a 'worldly mindset' might respond when disagreeing with governing authorities?

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- What are examples of how a 'renewed mindset' might respond when disagreeing with governing authorities?
- How can we reconcile these truths in Rom 13:1-7 with governments that do evil, wicked things?
- What are some examples of rulers who have done evil things (past and present)?
- Why would God allow such rulers/governments to come to power?
- What is the responsibility of a Christian who lives under such a ruler/government?
- Can you think of specific examples of people who have disagreed with their governments while demonstrating a godly mindset?
- What if you do not believe that a particular 'ruler' deserves your honor and respect? How should you behave towards that person?
- Why is it often hard for us to submit to authority, even good authority?