



ROMANS 13:1-7

Devotional

Romans 13:1-7

¹ 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.

² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ 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, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ 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.

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Day 1

ROMANS 13:1-2

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.

Is there a thought within us when we read those verses and wonder, “Ok Paul, but where are your caveats, your exceptions? You know, for the bad governments?” What is our path forward in interacting with the governors with whom we disagree?

Consider: November 3. What a privilege and responsibility we have in our country. Let’s vote.

Consider also Jesus’s interaction with Pilate in John 19. When Jesus was silent before him, Pilate responded, “You will not speak to me? 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.” God has purposes that we can’t even begin to understand. When we don’t trust our governors, remember, we can trust God.

Consider finally Acts 5. The temple leaders and authorities strictly charged Peter and the apostles to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. But the apostles said they needed to obey God rather than men and they wouldn’t agree to stop sharing the good news. The apostles ended up receiving a beating and they rejoiced for the honor. So resisting leaders when to obey them directly means disobeying God doesn’t mean everything will be easy. We will suffer consequences.

Paul says he wants us to trust God. So let’s be careful to not move too quickly to thinking we need to resist authorities. Romans 13 really calls us to trust God as we obey those in authority over us. Can we trust the Lord as an act of worship? There are a lot of cultural references to resisting authority. It’s been the theme of popular songs and movies for generations. Maybe you remember as a young kid digging in your heels when you didn’t want to go to bed; or as a teenager challenging a dress code; or later in a job resisting a change in the workplace that didn’t make sense to you. These verses remind us that authorities are put in place by God and that he put them in place for our good and his purposes.

Let’s take a look today at our default position in relation to authority. Is it to resist? To scoff? To be passive? Romans 13 calls us to an active posture of yielding to government. Let’s ask for God’s help to do that.

Prayer

Dear Father, we love our own ideas, perceptions and thoughts. We can see so many problems with our government. Give us the humility to answer your call to yield to those in authority over us. Thank you that we can trust you, who stands behind every government official. Please protect those in government positions and give them your wisdom. Please guide those of us who are of age and US citizens as we prepare to vote in November. Give us the diligence, time and humility to really research those running for office. Give us wisdom as we vote. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Day 2

ROMANS 13:3-4a

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.

Part of our renewed mind is a new perspective on authority. The sinful nature we inherited from birth resents or resists being told what to do. This might look like obvious refusal or a legalistic compliance. The new nature we have in Christ understands God is a good and merciful father, but also a sovereign king whose will is "good, acceptable and perfect." Now we can see those in authority over us as His representatives, here to promote order, peace, and justice. This frees us from resentment and fear. If we are driving within the speed limit, we don't have to be afraid when we see a police car behind us. Likewise, submitting to God's authority by respecting and obeying those placed over us is joining Him in His purpose to overcome evil with good.

How do you think, feel, act toward the people God has placed in authority over you in your home, school, community, or nation? Think of one specific way you could honor God by showing respect to some authority over you.

Look back to Romans 12:9-21 to see some of the ways you can/have promoted what is good in the past week.

Prayer

Sovereign King, You have rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and a master who did not love us, but instead enslaved us. Help us live out of the gratitude and freedom of your good rule over us. Please forgive us for so easily resenting or resisting those you have placed over us and show us the joy of obedience that is in Jesus. In His name, Amen

Day 3

ROMANS 13:4b

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 chapter 12:19 we were told, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.*” It seems that when the complete thought that Paul is expounding is made clear with 12:19 and 13:4b that a distinction is being made between personal vengeance and God-ordained, state justice. Do you find this easy or difficult to accept? What are some of the realities that make this important? What are some of the realities that make this difficult?

God's law for OT Israel delineated several crimes as capital offenses (Murder Ex. 21:12-14, Kidnapping Ex. 21:16, Human Sacrifice Lev. 20:2-5, etc... We call God's law arrangement with Israel a theocracy (i.e. a direct rule by God). Even before the theocracy, at the remaking of the world after the flood, God said as a principle, “whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (cf. Gen. 9:5,6). While we recognize that we are no longer under the theocracy of Israel, how does this principle fit with what Paul is saying here in Rom. 13? What are the challenges that we have with being faithful with something like capital punishment today?

Romans 13:4b is also the *locus classicus* to defend war that is just in the Lord's sight. Other Christians are pacifist, believing that war is never a NT option? What do you think? What are some of the obstacles for just war?

Prayer

Most Gracious King, there are many things that are hard to understand as we navigate our life before you. We thank you that you are a God of justice. It is hard to imagine a society in this fallen world that did recognize right and wrong. Yet we confess, as fallen creatures, we see attempts at enacting justice, even our best governmental attempts, often fall short or miss the mark entirely. Lord please enlighten our hearts to love your justice. Please endow those you have placed in positions of authority to enact this justice in accordance with your will. Thank you that you underwent the ultimate justice on the cross for all of our personal and governmental failings. Help us not to be discouraged in these days, even as we long for that great day when your perfect justice will be revealed. Amen.

Day 4

ROMANS 13:5

Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

Paul has some suggestions for what submission to authorities looks like. First Christians should submit to authorities because they are appointed by God (vv.1-2), second they have divinely appointed power to punish evildoers (vv.3-4) now he adds "conscience." The word he uses here refers to an inner moral compass that points people to a manner of life organized as right by both God and people. Can you recognize when your conscience is "activated?" How does our conscience act as a "moral compass" in daily matters?

Earlier in Romans Paul says that *"For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."* (Rom 7:15) He is pricked by his conscience by the Spirit by the inconsistent ways he is thinking, believing and living. He concludes those thoughts with *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* Paul acknowledges his need for Jesus even when it comes to matters of conscience. How can you submit to Jesus as the "true north" of your moral compass? Where might God be pricking your heart today? What does it look like to fall on your knees and submit your understanding of good and evil before the Lord?

Prayer

Lord we submit to you that our moral compass must be rooted and grounded in you. You have said that the law of the Lord is written on our hearts, and this law should guide us in matters of conscience. We confess that oftentimes we suppress the way our conscience leads us, in matters big and small we, like Paul and others, do what we ought not to do. Forgive us, gracious Father. Help us, Lord, to see through your eyes the beauty of your law and how it is lovely to be lived out. Grant us what we need today to be aware of how you are leading us. Give us clarity towards your purposes and connect our conscience to our acts of submission to you O Lord first and foremost, help us where we are weak in conscience in regards to submission to authorities. Guide us for the sake of your gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 5

ROMANS 13:6-8

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.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

The teaching in these verses flows out of the divine commission given to the state to promote righteousness and justice. The principle is that we are to support such a state practically and attitudinally. Noting that both Jesus (see below) and Paul apply this with respect to a pagan Roman state, do you believe that we can rebel against this command if the state does not follow the Lord?

Here Paul very closely echoes the words of Jesus in Mk. 12:17 where he says in reference to paying taxes, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” In that context, Jesus handles a Roman coin and talks about the image of the emperor placed on the coin. He seems to be saying that we are free to give the world’s goods to the world’s government and that we are bound to give ourselves, bearing God’s image, to his service of loving others. How do you see this same thought echoed here in Romans? Would you say that your heart is free with regards to this world’s goods? Do you recognize the image of God in other humans and grant them the honor and respect they are owed?

Prayer

Lord it is very humbling to realize that you have created us in your image and called us to live as your representatives here on earth. Help us to recognize that image both in ourselves and in others. Help us today to honor, respect and love every person with whom we have contact. Help us also to live freely with regards to this world's goods. May we not grudge the taxes that we pay. We pray for those governmental leaders that you have ordained. May they have the wisdom they need to utilize the resources they have wisely. Thank you that your love for us does not depend on us or our government getting this right, but rather on the finished work of Jesus that has fulfilled the law of love on our behalf. We pray in his sweet name, Amen.