

**ESSENTIAL REMINDERS ABOUT RESPONDING TO GOVERNMENT**  
**ROMANS 13:1-7**

Last week we began talking about “Election Essentials” — understanding what the Bible has to say about politics, the church, and you. We began that series by thinking about the role of government and the authorities in government — what is the role of government and what kind of character should leaders in government exhibit? We found from Romans 13 that the government’s primary roles are to:

- ✓ Restrain Evil
- ✓ Promote Good
- ✓ Avenge Evil

And with that we found that government has a mandate from God to do those things because God appoints every government and every official and they are all servants of Him. And because every governmental leader is a servant of God, we also saw that those leaders:

- ✓ Should Not be Evil
- ✓ Should be Good
- ✓ Should be Servants

We don’t typically think in those kinds of categories when we think about government, but that *is* how God thinks about government.

There is another way to think about government that is contrary to the way most Americans think about government and that is our response to government — how do we relate to the government? And Paul is exceedingly clear in this passage about how we should treat the government. Simply said,

**EVERY BELIEVER SHOULD HONOR HIS GOVERNMENT.**

Or even more precisely, *because God has ordained every government*, every believer should honor his government. How will we honor the government? In these verses, Paul identifies three basic responsibilities the believer has to the government:

**1. SUBMIT to the Government (vv. 1-2, 5)**

- ✓ Submission is for ALL people (v. 1)
- ✓ Lack of submission is rebellion against GOD (v. 2)
- ✓ Submission is for maintaining a clear CONSCIENCE (v. 5)

**2. Do What is GOOD (vv. 3-4)**

**3. Pay Your TAXES (vv. 6-7)**

- As we come to these verses, remember that it is in the application section of Romans.
- In chs. 1-11 Paul established the theological basis of his ministry by articulating the gospel through his explanation of sin, salvation, sanctification, and sovereignty.
- In chapter 12, Paul begins applying those truths as he thinks about service. What does the life of the believer look like in light of his salvation? Cf. **12:1-2**. Part of his transformed life is the way he relates to the government that is over him. He doesn't think about the government the way his culture does; he thinks about his government the way God wants him to think about his government.
- And he is called to *honor* his government. And the first way Paul identifies to honor the government is by submitting to the government...

## 1. **SUBMIT to the Government (vv. 1-2, 5)**

### • Submission is for **ALL** people (v. 1)

- ✓ When Paul says every person is ***to be in subjection***, he uses a familiar NT word; it is the same word as he uses in Eph. 5:21 (and implied in 5:22; also Tt. 2:5) and Tt. 2:9 (slaves to masters) — wherever the believer has someone in authority over him, he needs to place himself *willingly* under that authority and follow that authority.
- ✓ The person who submits does so willingly and voluntarily. He *chooses* to submit. And submission is the attitude of heart that results in joyful and God-honoring obedience.
- ✓ This means that wherever the government has mandated a law, the believer is under obligation to submit to that law. And Paul is very clear that this is for ***every person*** (lit., “every soul”). This is not optional for anyone. No matter where or when anyone lives, he is to place himself under the authority of the government and follow it.
- ✓ Some have suggested that Paul is being ironic — what he is saying is so absurd that he must have meant the opposite — he doesn't mean that we are to be submissive, but that we are to be subversive. Except this is the consistent teaching of Scripture.
  - It is what was taught in the OT to Israel — after Jerusalem was sent to captivity in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah wrote a letter to those in captivity, saying, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” (Jer. 29:7).
  - This is what Jesus taught — **Mt. 22:15-22**
  - This is also what Peter wrote in his first letter to a church that was scattered (1 Pt. 2:13-14, 17).
  - And this is what Paul wrote to Titus (3:1-2). Except in Titus Paul not only says to submit, he also says to ***be obedient*** and to ***malign no one...***
    - ... This was written during the time of Nero who after he burned Rome, blamed the Christians and had them crucified, burned as torches, and covered with the skins of animals and torn by dogs.

- ... Under Rome, Jerusalem was overrun in A.D. 70, destroying the Temple and killing 1.1 million.
- ... Polybius said it was almost “impossible to find...personal conduct more treacherous or public policy more unjust than in Crete.” And, the Cretans were constantly involved in ‘insurrections, murders and internecine wars’.
- ... It is these kind of governmental leaders Paul said they were to obey (constantly, continually). We’re quick to talk about civil disobedience, but the emphasis in this verse is on civil *obedience*. Why?
  - Contextually, we should obey government because rebellion against government is a mark of the unbelieving life (v. 3 — foolish and disobedient). And because obedience is a mark of the transforming work of Christ and the Spirit (vv. 5-6; 2:14).
  - We also obey because our obedience is a demonstration of our conformity to Christ — we do what He did (1 Pt. 2:21ff)
  - And we obey because our obedience is a testimony to unbelievers (1 Pt. 2:12-15). We silence their slander.
  - Summary: If a law is made and it applies to me, I must obey. And that is what is hard for most of us, because we are trained culturally to distrust and resist leadership.
  - Disobedience and rebellion may be commendable attributes in the culture, but they are condemnable attributes in the believer.

- **ASIDE:** When is it permissible to disobey (or is it ever permissible to disobey)?

1. When we are commanded to worship falsely (Dan. 3). When the government calls us to give allegiance to someone above Christ, we not only *can* we disobey, but we *must* disobey the gov’t.
  - If I disobey the government, I can expect consequences from the government, and it is not my place to complain bitterly about them (cf. **Dan. 3:15-18**).
  - Even in disobedience, it is possible to do it (and it must be done) respectfully (Dan. 1:8, 11-14).
2. When we are commanded to disobey clear command of God (**Acts 5:28-29, 40-41**).
  - Notice that the point is that Peter is talking about clear violations of God’s decree(s). This is not a reference to laws I don’t happen to like. I may not agree with a speed limit or a tax or a federal budget, but those are not forcing me to disobey the Lord and I cannot violate them.
  - Civil disobedience is not an option given to make us more “comfortable” and give us an easy life. In fact, if we disobey, life may often become more “uncomfortable,” because of the consequences that come from the government. We will honor God when we willingly and joyfully accept the consequences of our disobedience from the government. There’s no complaining if we suffer as a result of our disobedience (**Acts 5:41**).
  - E.g., Homosexual marriage is now legalized. But disobedience only becomes a possibility for me when I am forced to perform a wedding for a homosexual couple (and the day may come sooner than we anticipate). If I disobey and go to jail, then I go to jail...

- ✓ Notice also that the submission is to the ***governing authorities***. The word ***authorities*** refers to anyone who by position has an ability, right, and “permission” to exercise power over others — his commands and will must be obeyed by others. When used of governmental leaders (as here), there is never any promise that these leaders will be righteous. In fact, because they are men, these leaders will always be sinners, just as the citizens are. And the citizens must still submit to them.
- ✓ Even if the individual is flawed (and he will be), if he has a position that requires our submission, we do so as an expression of joyful obedience to God.
- ✓ A Christian cannot be an anarchist.

*“Submissiveness has always portrayed the Spirit of Christ in His people. Rebellion has never produced any response from God other than judgment.” [Kenyon, quoted by Hiebert]*

- ✓ Our default response to our government should always be submission and obedience. Most of us struggle with this. Submission is not an American value, but it is a Biblical and godly value. One writer has rightly said,

*“Much, [though] not all, of the anti-government sentiment in the United States today is thinly veiled hatred of law and exaltation of brutal self-will. Thus it easily slips over into ‘righteous wrongdoing.’” [Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 22]*

- ✓ Are you in willing submission to your governmental authorities? Have you chosen to submit to them and are you content and at peace with that? Are you reading and meditating on the things that will make it easier for you to submit? Submission will only happen as your mind is renewed. Take care to give Scripture more weight to how you think about your government than anything else.

- **Lack of submission is rebellion against GOD (v. 2)**

- ✓ Not everyone finds it easy to submit to government, so Paul reminds us of the consequence of rebellion against the government — ***whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God***.
  - To ***resist*** the government is to align oneself in opposition to the authority and to fight against.
  - The problem with such resistance and rebellion is that it is also ***opposed to God’s ordinance*** — it is to stand against God, “shaking one’s fist” against Him.
  - Paul is appealing to the truth of v. 1 — God has established and ordained every authority so to resist those authorities is to be in opposition to what God has commanded and ordained.
- ✓ We are prone to minimizing discontentment and rebellion as an American right to free speech. But the free speech must first of all be speech that is submissive as unto the Lord and befitting Christ.
- ✓ No one suffered more injustice from a civil government or court than Christ. Yet His example was humility and submission (Jn. 18:33-38). It would have been easiest for Pilate to condemn Christ, yet by the end of the conversation he was ready to acquit Christ. This is why Peter says what he does in 1 Pt. 2:22-25. He was truthful, humble, and submissive. And that is our example (1 Pt. 2:21).

- ✓ Understand that if you and I oppose the government, we invite the judgment of God on ourselves — ***will receive condemnation upon themselves.***
- ✓ R. C. Sproul rightly says, “If we resist the authorities that God has appointed, we might be regarded as heroes by some, but we can expect only the visitation of God’s judgment.”
- ✓ The judgment comes through the government (vv. 3-4), but it is from God.
- ✓ As we live in this world and under this government (which at this point is only persecuting us with words and not with physical atrocities as in Rome), we do well to “so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (12:18).

- Submission is for maintaining a clear CONSCIENCE (v. 5)

- ✓ If we do not submit to the government, then we face the judgment of God through the avenging actions of the government (vv. 4-5a). But we also are in danger of sinning against our consciences.
- ✓ So Paul says in v. 5 — ***it is necessary to be in subjection.*** Submission to government is a divine constraint. It’s not optional. Because God has ordained government and given it particular duties, the individual is always (as much as possible) to be in submission to that authority.
- ✓ And one of the primary reasons he gives for our submission is our ***conscience.***
  - Remember that in 2:15 Paul said every person has been given a conscience. This is not the Holy Spirit in believers, but an innate understanding of a divine moral code — what is right and what is sin. And that conscience is to guide and direct our activities.
  - The conscience is a guide, monitor, witness, and judge to and of our moral actions. The conscience functions as both a guide to morality and evaluator of the moral quality of our actions. So Naselli and Crowley write this: “Your conscience guides you to help you conform to moral standards, monitors how you conform to them, testifies to how you conform to them, and judges how you conform to them, thus making you feel guilt and pain....The conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong. It’s basically your...moral awareness turned back on yourself.” [*Conscience*, Kindle location 541.]
  - And what Paul is thus inferring in this verse is that God has placed in the conscience of every man the truth that the government is given for his good and he is to submit to it (vv. 1b-2). And if he does not submit, he is sinning against his conscience and training himself to be rebellious against his conscience.
  - Especially for the believer, sinning against our conscience and what we know is true is one of the worst things we can do against ourselves.
  - Luther said, “To go against conscience is neither right nor safe.” He was right. We never want to train ourselves to ignore or go against our conscience.
  - Naselli and Crowley: “As a general rule, you should assume that your conscience is reliable, even if it isn’t perfect. And since conscience is usually right, the Bible says that we should do what our conscience says until we are convinced from Scripture that it needs adjusting.” [location 797]

- Elsewhere they add, “When you ignore your conscience, you foolishly reject God’s priceless gift and thus defy the God who made you.” [“Why You Shouldn’t Ignore Your Conscience”]
  - ✓ When we don’t submit to the government, we violate our consciences and train ourselves to sin even more (in other areas as well).
  - ✓ Submit to the government as much as you are able (without disobeying God) and by that, keep your conscience clear of sin.
- One of the main points of these verses is that believers are to honor the government. And one way we do that is by submitting to the government, its laws, and its rulers. There is a second way that we honor the government...

## 2. Do What is GOOD (vv. 3-4)

- Twice in v. 3 Paul says to do good — ***good behavior...do what is good***.
  - ✓ As I noted last week, the phrase ***good behavior*** is actually “good works,” and is often used in of the good works of the believer after his salvation (Rom. 2:7; Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:21; 3:17).
  - ✓ Paul is thinking more broadly than that — the good behavior here also includes obedience to the law of the government (v. 3a) and doing things that are good and beneficial for the government and society — things that have social significance and kindness.
- Paul will talk about one act of goodness in v. 6 (paying taxes), but there are also other good acts:
  - ✓ It is anything that demonstrates godly love and goodness, and especially anything that relates to citizenship and doing what is best for country/culture. It is in contrast to those who are ***worthless for good deeds*** (Tt. 1:16).
    - It could be things like picking up the trash along the road to your house, giving a homeless man a meal, volunteering to serve at the hospital one day a week, delivering meals on wheels, mowing your homebound neighbor’s yard, reading to children at the local elementary school, serving as a delegate to your political party’s convention, fixing a flat tire for a stranded motorist, baking cookies and sharing them at the police station with the officers, saying something kind to your server at a restaurant, hosting a foreign exchange student or a teenager who is struggling at school, or... We should be known for being “good” and doing good.
    - It also means to be involved in the political process (without putting our hope in that process). We live in a very unique place in history — few have had the options available for us to engage in the political process. So, that means we can (and should) vote; we can enter into politics either as a candidate or as some kind of advocate for a cause or law (which is why GBC supports the BPC and why several GBC members were instrumental in its founding...).

- We can petition and write and discuss and defend the truth. We can engage in thoughtful discussion and debate. But those actions must always be done in a way that honors God and in a way that demonstrates we are still trusting God and not the law or candidate we support.

*"It is not enough...for Christians to be law-abiding (so far as our conscience permits us); we are to be public-spirited as well, to be ready (eager, not reluctant) to do whatever is good (lb), whenever we have the opportunity. According to both Paul and Peter, the state has the double duty to punish evil and to promote good. So God's people should be ready to cooperate with it in both these areas." [Stott, 199.]*

- ✓ Doing good also means praying for those who are in authority over us (1 Tim 2:1-2). We are to pray for whatever they need as they lead (v. 1) and for their salvation (v. 3). And pray with gratitude to God for them (v. 1)! Note also the reason for this in v. 2!
- ✓ And of course the best good we can do for others and the greatest influence we can have on the culture is to evangelize (**Mt. 5:16**; 20:25-28) — Sometimes we get involved in political activities because it is easier (and more culturally acceptable) than evangelism.
  - The problem in our country is not the government, but the people who elect the leaders. Our leaders are a composite of who we are as a country. And we will only see a change in the government when the people of the country are converted to Christ.
  - I am not the least bit hopeful about the future of this country, but I am completely hopeful and confident of the future under Christ the King. Our task is not to fix the culture, but to live and speak the gospel so that as many in this culture as possible will believe (**Col. 4:5-6**).
- So, God says that believers are to honor the government by submitting to it and doing good, and...

### 3. Pay Your TAXES (vv. 6-7)

- This might be the toughest principle for us to accept in this passage. No one likes to pay taxes. But Paul says twice in these verses, **Pay your taxes**. If you owe a tax, pay it.
  - ✓ "But you don't understand — you don't know how unfair the taxes are and how foolishly the money is spent and how ungodly the men are who are spending it..." Yes, Paul does.

In NT times under Herod the Great, taxes in Pal. were levied on almost everything, esp. on the fields....The kinds of taxes grew in such numbers that both rich and poor felt the heavy burden. There were land or real estate taxes, a poll tax (Matt 22:17), export and import taxes collected at seaports and the gates of cities or country, a crop tax (one-tenth of the grain crop and one-fifth of the wine, fruit and oil), an income tax of one percent of a man's income per year, taxes to use a road, to enter certain towns, taxes on animals and vehicles, a salt tax, sales tax, tax on the sale of slaves and the transfer of property, and emergency taxes! [ZPEB]

- ✓ In spite of that, Paul says ***because of this you pay taxes*** — that is, because of their role as servants of God to restrain evil, they need money to carry out justice and they need money to live while they fulfill that God-ordained responsibility. They have ***devoted themselves*** to their responsibility and they need to eat, so we need to provide for them in their roles.
  - ✓ Now that doesn't give them a right to become wealthy in their role, but it does mean that we have a responsibility to pay. Period.
  - ✓ "Christians should accept their tax liability with good grace, paying their dues in full, both national and local, direct and indirect, and also giving proper esteem to the officials who collect and apply them." [Stott]
- Do the tax gatherers abuse their privileges? Certainly.
    - ✓ Remember the story of Zaccheus? Lk. 19:2ff. He could pay back 4x what he collected and apparently still have some leftover.
    - ✓ One historian tells about the emperor Trajan who in 106 A.D. plundered the treasury of taxes and essentially transferred the tax money and spoils of war to his personal accounts, becoming what would be a millionaire today, in the process. [*Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, 68]
    - ✓ What would God say? Pay your taxes. That's what Jesus told Peter (Mt. 17:24-27; 22:15-17).
  - And Paul goes even beyond paying taxes — ***render to all...*** If anyone might rightly receive anything from you, make sure that you ***render*** it to him (the sense is that there is a debt that needs payback).
    - ✓ ***tax*** — reinforcing what he's just said in v. 6.
    - ✓ ***custom*** — this is another term that relates to taxation — "revenue" — taxation on goods and services (like the sales of land, houses, oil, and grass).
    - ✓ ***fear*** — respect, reverence — even (especially?) of those who collect the taxes.
    - ✓ ***honor*** — to treat honorably all those who are in authority; in Tt. 3:2 Paul says we are to "malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." That sums it up well. We are to talk well about our authorities and treat them with dignity, respect, and honor.
    - ✓ In a country where our heritage includes slogans like, "Don't tread on me," and "We serve no sovereign," that isn't easy. It is ingrained in us as Americans to be distrustful of leadership (our country was born out of such rebellion). Yet Jesus, Peter, and Paul all lived under a government what was vastly worse than ours, and the consistent message was, "honor your authorities." That was the calling for the believer then; that is still our calling. No matter who our authorities are, they deserve to be honored by us through submission, doing good, and paying taxes.

**CONCLUSION:** I can do no better in summarizing this than echoing the commentator Douglas Moo: "Government is more than a nuisance to be put up with; it is an institution established by God to accomplish some of his purposes on earth..." And because that's true, honor the government.

**BENEDICTION:** Rom. 11:33-35