

## Romans

### I. Living Godly In The World & Church

A. Romans 13:1-7 . . . Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. [2] Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. [3] For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; [4] for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. [5] Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. [6] For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. [7] Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

### B. Prayer

### II. Living godly in relation to governments – background and qualifiers

A. There has been a lot of discussion and debate about this portion of Romans, but before getting to the specifics of these verses, I want to give some background about the time in which these exhortations were written.

1. According to our best understanding of Paul's missionary journeys, he wrote Romans during a stopover in Corinth – from the last couple months of AD56 to the early part of AD57.
  - a. We learn from Romans 15:19,23, that Paul had just come from doing missionary work in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. And we know from Romans 15:25-26, that he was headed to Jerusalem to deliver the offerings – sent by the churches where he had just come from – for the needy Christians in Jerusalem.
  - b. In Romans 1:10-13; 15:22, Paul speaks of having wanted to visit the church in Rome, but has not yet been able to get there.
2. There is no mention in the NT as to how the church in Rome got its start, but history implies it came into existence in or around AD49. The book of Romans implies it was made up of Jews and Gentiles, though it seems the majority of the converts were Gentiles.

3. In Romans 16:5, 10,11,14,15, Paul greets five different households and the believers that meet with those households, which makes it seem that the Christians in Rome did not meet in one central location, but in five different homes.
  4. Nero was emperor of Rome from AD54-68. However, in spite of his bad reputation, the first few years of his rule were generally peaceful for all of Rome and its territories. It wasn't until the great fire that destroyed much of Rome in AD64 that Nero began persecuting Christians. Up until that time, Christians were given the same protection as Jews to practice their religion – mostly because they were seen by the Romans as a Jewish sect.
  5. However, after the fire, Nero needed someone to blame in order to survive politically, so he put the blame on the Christians and began persecuting them as if they were a threat to Roman rule.
  6. My purpose for telling you this is to make it clear that Paul wrote these words during a time when the prevailing government in the known world – which was Rome – was not persecuting Christians. In fact, Rome was protecting their right to worship the Jewish God just as they protected the Jewish right to worship their own God.
    - a. This does not mean Christians weren't being persecuted at all, for we know Paul – when he was Saul and a practicing Jew – persecuted them.
    - b. Therefore, when Paul wrote Romans, Christians were primarily persecuted by the Jews, though the Jews often used the Roman government to assist them – just as they did with Jesus and again with the apostle Paul. 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 affirms that the Jews were the primary source of persecution at that time.
    - c. Beyond being persecuted by the Jews, some Christians were persecuted in the outlying territories and provinces under Roman rule. We read about this in Hebrews 10:32-34.
- B. Qualifiers for keeping these verses in their proper perspective
1. There are several qualifiers to keep in mind as we look at Romans 13:1-7. One of the first qualifiers is the fact that there are good governments, bad governments, and evil governments. This is not just a fact from history, it is a current reality today. There are governments and people groups that persecute, imprison, torture, and even kill Christians. But many of these governments and groups also do evil things to those who are of a different ethnic or religious group, those who are citizens of other nations, those who speak out

against injustice and work for justice, and anyone else who is seen as a threat to the security of those in power.

- a. However, Romans 13:1-7 is not focused on the morality of any particular governing body, or form of government. Rather it is focused on how Christians are to respond to the governing authorities regardless of their form or quality. And in particular, this portion directs us toward being submissive, respectful, giving honor to those in leadership, and paying our share of the taxes.
  - b. So though we could probably have a rousing debate about how Christians are to respond to evil governments, such a debate won't help us apply what Paul is saying here in Romans 13.
2. A second qualifier is the fact that the OT reveals God as making use of nations – be they godly or ungodly – to chastise or bring judgment on other nations that God wants to discipline or punish.
- a. For example, in Jeremiah 27:1-11, God tells Jeremiah to warn the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon that He was going to punish them for their evil ways, and He was going to use Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, to do it.
  - b. God's words puts it this way: "Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him. [7] All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings will make him their servant" (Jeremiah 27:6-7).
  - c. God further revealed His power over the nations by saying: [8] "It will be, that the nation or the kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine and with pestilence until I have destroyed it by his hand. [11] But the nation which will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let remain on its land and they will till it and dwell in it" (Jeremiah 27:8,11). (Keep these two verses in mind when we get to Romans 13:2, for they help explain what Paul says there.)
  - d. The point here is that God uses specific governments – both good and evil – to discipline and bring judgment on sinful people, tribes, and nations. But I also want to make clear that should the government God is using treat the people God is judging in a cruel, evil way, or if they continue on as a sinful nation, God will judge and punish them for the evils they have done.

3. A third qualifier is alluded to in 1 Samuel 12:14-15 . . . “If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. [15] If you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers.” Therefore, in most cases, the moral condition of a nation or tribe or community will powerfully influence the kind of government they get, and in fact, deserve.
  4. The final qualifier I want to address today is that there is only one justifiable reason to refuse to submit to the government over you, and that is when the authorities are requiring you to compromise or renounce your allegiance to God and your obedience to His word.
    - a. Last week we talked about this in relation to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They submitted and lived in peace with the governing authority until they were required to compromise their allegiance to God and obedience to His commands.
    - b. Peter addresses this same principle in 1 Peter 4:15-16, “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler (that is, submit and to what is right and good); [16] but if anyone suffers as a Christian (remains faithful to God in the face of governmental requirements to do otherwise), he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.
- C. Romans 13:1 . . . Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.
1. The first two words of this verse are EVERY PERSON, and it sets the standard for who is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. And though it includes everyone, it is especially important for Christians to live this way because we represent God, and the Christ-like life, and the reputation of the church.
  2. The next three words to note are IN SUBJECTION TO, which simply mean to submit to or obey.
    - a. However, most of us understand that saying these words is easy, while living them in difficult situations and under the rule of evil authorities is hard.
    - b. Yet that is what God is asking us to do, and though it is hard, we are to freely and willfully submit and obey as far as we can.

- c. Now I believe it is important for us to understand that living this way is first and foremost a matter of faith in God. In other words, if as Christians we do not submit to the governing authorities – except for the one exception we’ve already talked about – it means we have already stopped submitting to God. And if we have stopped submitting to God, it means we have chosen not to trust God – at least in that area.
  - d. Therefore, trusting in the wisdom, goodness, and justice of God is essential to putting yourself in subjection to governing authorities – and especially so when they are bad.
3. The two words GOVERNING AUTHORITIES is general enough that we must include all levels of government in this group. This general application is affirmed by 1 Peter 2:13-15 . . . Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, [14] or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. [15] For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.
4. The next thing Romans 13:1 says is that “there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”
- a. On top of the all-inclusive “every person is to be in subjection,” Paul adds a second all-inclusive statement when he says that all authority comes from God, and those which exist (currently) are established (appointed, ordained) by God.
    - (1) Now keep in mind that this truth does not negate the qualifier that allegiance to God and obedience to His word comes before submission to those in positions of earthly authority over us.
    - (2) We are reminded of this by Peter’s words to the Jewish Council when he and the other apostles were arrested for preaching the gospel in Jerusalem. Peter said, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).
    - (3) However, Paul makes no mention of the exception here, because that is not his point. The point is that ALL authority comes from God. And we know from scripture, both the OT and the NT, that this includes good and bad authorities.
    - (4) For example, Jesus remained silent when standing before Pilate who was about to commit a great injustice by having Jesus beaten and put through a torturous death on a cross. So Pilate said to Him, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have

authority to crucify You?” Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:10-11).

- b. Now let's stop here for a moment and consider this situation, for the day may come when you or those you love are in just such a situation.
  - (1) Think of yourself as either an observer or on the receiving end of this great, cruel injustice that is taking place at the hands of authorities who are willfully committing the injustice.
  - (2) What is the likelihood you would be thinking, “These people in this position of authority are in this position because God either put them here or He has allowed them to be here.”
  - (3) Now let's return our thoughts to Pilate. Even though he grievously sinned against Jesus and against God by condemning a man he knew was innocent to death, he had authority because God gave it to him.
- c. It certainly is easier to agree with this truth after the fact, that is, by looking back. And in Pilate's case, the Bible tells us this is the way it was.
  - (1) But would you have come to this same conclusion while in the midst of such an injustice by a governing authority? Would you look to God and trust in Him to bring about the end result He chooses, as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
  - (2) Yet that is how we are to think, and how we are to look at those in authority today.
- 5. Now you may be thinking that Pilate was a special case because someone had to put Jesus to death. However, the OT and world history shows that God has used many evil governments to either chastise and punish, or bring about a greater good than existed before the evil government came to power. And though we cannot see what God was doing or is doing in all these cases, there are a few examples where we can more easily see God at work.
  - a. For example, look at the evil of Communism in China. It drove out the Christian missionaries and tried to squash the Christian religion. Yet the Christian church grew faster and larger under the tyrannical and atheistic rule of Communism than when missionaries were allowed to work unhindered. And though that is a great work of God, it is probable God had a twofold purpose:

- (1) One, to chastise and punish China for its centuries of idol worship and sinfulness.
  - (2) Two, to bring about the greater good of building the church and advancing Christianity.
- b. I believe another example is our own country. For many years we have been governed by a democracy that worked well. But as we became the richest country in the world, and selfishly consumed a disproportional amount of the worlds goods, our moral framework began to disintegrate. Today, many of us serve the money god, the science god, the psychology god, and the god of fame. We have enriched the drug cartels, the drug companies, and the insurance industry. Instead of repenting and changing our ways, we've spent millions on finding cures for emotional, mental, and physical illnesses brought on by sin. We have been deliberate in the killing of unborn babies and proud that we are progressive enough to openly practice homosexuality and engage in same sex marriage. And all of this supported and even led by our government.
- (1) And should you think God is not involved in our current events, look at the selection of presidential candidates that are hoping to become their party's nominee for the November election.
  - (2) Look at the cost of medical and old age care. Look at the cost of health, home, and car insurance. Look at the aging and disintegration of our infrastructure of roads, bridges, water systems, and inner cities – and consider the cost to replace them. Look at the poverty, and the abundance of folks on depression medication.
  - (3) It is my observation that God is chastising us for worshiping false Gods such as money, medical science, and psychology. We are losing our money, our mental health, and our moral values, and we are about to vote in a government that our moral condition deserves.

### III. Conclusion

- A. So what are we to do as Christians? The first thing Paul says to do is to submit to the governing authorities. Why? Because that forms the foundational mindset and attitudes for properly applying the rest of what Paul and other scriptures say about how we Christians are to relate to those in authority over us.