

A Gospel Response to Government - Part 1

Tom Pennington • Romans 13:1-7

Well, I invite you to take your Bible with me this morning and turn to Romans 13. You know I would like to tell you that six years ago when I began our study in the book of Romans I sat down before hand and planned out and said, "You know there's going to be a pandemic in 2020 and if I lay out my studies just right, then we will be covering Romans 13 and the response to government just when all of us are wondering about the guidelines and how we should respond to government and so forth". I didn't do that; I couldn't have arranged that but obviously the Lord did. So here we find ourselves in a very appropriate text for the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

But as we begin our study of Romans 13, I really do not want you to think about the U.S. and the current political environment that has really fractured the nation. Instead I want to begin for just a moment by creating a country in your imagination. Imagine with me if you would, that you live in a country where the politicians all come from only wealthy families and the current leader of the nation is really, really young, he has no experience, in fact the only thing he has to offer is his family's pedigree.

He comes to power under questionable circumstances, in fact rumors are circulating that his mother may have very well poisoned his predecessor. Once this young man comes to power, he begins to shred the nation's laws. He begins by banning capital punishment, he reduces taxes without reducing government expenditures and he begins spending wildly on the arts. As time goes on, we discover that this leader has a dark side. Word spreads that he's involved with married women and even worse with young boys. As time goes on, we discover that he actually ends up "marrying" his male companion. He flaunts his power by completely ignoring the other positions of state. He is implicated even in plots to murder some of his own citizens, a number of innocent people including, if you can believe it, even his own mother.

It turns out as time unfolds, that he hates the Christian faith. He begins to attack it, he begins to persecute its leaders. He rules for many years essentially dismantling the country that we have come to know and love, then he is run out of office by those who are tired of his abuses and he ends his young, troubled life by committing suicide.

If you lived in such a place, under such a ruler, how should you respond as a Christian? Well, as perhaps you have already guessed, there was such a country and there was such a ruler. It was Rome and the ruler was Nero. That was the government and that was the leader under which Paul, a Roman citizen, lived and the government and leader under which he wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome. The capital of the empire, the seat of Rome's power, the Washington D.C. of the empire. That is the context of the remarkable words we find in Romans 13.

We find ourselves, just to remind you of the overarching context of this paragraph, in the fourth and final section of the book of Romans. We have looked at him as he has explained the gospel, we have seen him not only explain the gospel but defend the gospel and now we are in the fourth section, the gospel applied. The transforming power of the gospel of grace. Beginning in chapter 12 verse 1 and running through chapter 15 verse 13, Paul ends his letter, except for the very concluding comments, by applying the truth of the gospel that he has explained in very practical ways. Here is how the gospel intersects with everyday life.

Now so far, we have discovered in this last major section, a gospel response to God. That is the message of chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. If you have come to embrace the gospel then God demands, and you owe Him, your body and your mind as a sacrifice. That is the message of those two verses. Then we learn in chapter 12 verses 3 through 8, a gospel response to service. Christ has gifted every believer who follows Him with the capacity to serve in His church and you are called to invest your time and efforts in serving His church using those gifts.

Now in the preliminary outline that I gave you a number of months ago, I broke the rest of chapter 12 into a response to believers and a response to enemies. But as I studied it further and as we saw it unfold together, I have concluded the rest of chapter 12 is really one large section on the priority and expressions of love: both a love for God and a love for others. So, I have changed the outline that I originally gave you, those of you who are meticulous note takers need to make note of this, and so the rest of chapter 12 beginning in verse 9 through verse 21 is a gospel response to love: how we need to love God and others.

Now today we begin chapter 13 and a new theme. It is a gospel response to government. That is the message of the paragraph that begins in chapter 13 verse 1 and runs through verse 7. If you have come to be a follower of Jesus Christ, if you have embraced the gospel, then here is how the gospel should impact your view of the government around you.

Let's read it together, Romans chapter 13, I will read verses 1 through 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. Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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; 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. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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.

Now this is one of those passages where Paul does not leave us wondering what the theme might be, he helps us by directly stating it. Notice the beginning of verse one, here is the theme: every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. This is the gospel response to government.

Now this paragraph has engendered a lot of debate. One of the main questions is, why is it here? In fact those who hate what it teaches have even gone so far as to say, it doesn't fit, it was inserted, it's not even original with Paul. But there is absolutely no manuscript evidence for maintaining that. It is supported by all of the manuscripts that we have; these are the words of the apostle Paul.

So, what is the connection with the surrounding context? Well the likely connection of this paragraph with what comes before, is back in chapter 12 verse 19. There we're told not to take personal vengeance. But here at the beginning of chapter 13, Paul reminds us that the fact that we are not to take personal vengeance doesn't mean that God doesn't care about justice. Even in this world, God is a God of perfect unwavering justice and justice will be done in His presence perfectly one day. But even in this world He cares about justice and He has put in place governing authorities. Instead of personal vengeance, God has brought justice and wrath through governing authorities on those who do evil. Not perfectly, their justice is not like God's, it is very imperfect and flawed. But nevertheless, it is an instrument that God uses.

Now this remarkable paragraph, either directly addresses or indirectly raises some really important questions about crucial issues. Let me just give you the list of what is here or what are the questions that are invited by what is here: You have the issue of the fundamental principle of human authority, you have the various structures of human authority, the different forms of human government, the divine purposes for human government, God's sovereign control of individual government officials, (here is a big one) the relationship between church and state, the validity of capital punishment, the validity and reasons for a just war, our responsibilities and duties to government and the biblical exceptions for submission to government. All of those are either here directly stated or indirectly raised by the content of this paragraph. And you need to know I plan to address all of those as we work our way through this passage together.

Now let me give you a working outline of this paragraph just so you can have a roadmap to see Paul's, the flow of his argument. First of all, you have the very first sentence of verse 1 is a universal command to submit to government. Then beginning with the very next line in verse 1 and running all the way down through verse 6, you have the reasons to submit to government, and then in verse 7 you have the components or elements or expressions of submission to government. This is what it entails; this is what it looks like. So that is sort of a roadmap of where we are going as we unpack this passage together. And again, just so you know, I do intend to take a few rabbit trails and address the issues that this passage raises along the way.

So, let us begin though where Paul begins and that is with a universal command to submit to government. Notice verse 1, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." Now as soon as I read that, I need to admit to you that when it comes to the Christian response to this passage and to

government, sadly most Christians tend to end up on one of two extremes. Perhaps you have been tempted to those extremes. I think we all are at one point or other.

One extreme is to focus solely on Romans 13 as the entire Christian response to government. In other words, some take this passage in isolation from the rest of Scripture and imagine that Christians owe a kind of mindless, unlimited obedience to everyone at all levels of government. People like this refuse to speak out against the sins of government, the sins of its officials, they assume there is no legitimate place for disagreement, or petition, or peaceful protest, or at times even disobedience. But that is not what this is teaching. You see we have to interpret this passage consistent with the rest of Scripture. You've heard the basic principle of biblical interpretation is, Scripture interprets Scripture. Do you know what that means? It is using the word Scripture in two different ways. The first time it uses it, it is talking about the entirety of Scripture, the second time it uses it, it is talking about an individual passage of Scripture. So, we could rephrase it this way: the entirety of Scripture informs and helps us interpret any specific given passage of Scripture. That is what we have to do as we come to this text as well. This is not all the Bible has to say about our response to government. That is one extreme.

A second extreme when it comes to the response to government, is to focus on the exceptions to Romans 13. Frankly, there are some Christians who spend their time trying to find new legitimate ways they can disobey the government. For them to obey this passage there almost has to be a truly Christian government with just rulers and laws that only reflect the Scripture. Folks, that is just not the real world. Such a government does not exist in a fallen world and never will. It will not exist until Jesus Christ rules on this planet. These Christians who hold this other extreme are often suspicious. They are suspicious of every official, of every law, they are quickly combative, they are consistently critical in what they say and write and post, and some even become mean spirited and belligerent even encouraging rebellion and revolution. How do you know if you are tempted in this direction? Just look at the bulk of what you spend your time reading and following about this issue. Look at what you "Like" most often, look at what you post or re-post most often. If the majority of that is about the exceptions to what you are commanded to do in Scripture here in Romans 13, then it is out of balance. You are in this extreme. The focus of your response to government needs to be Romans 13 and those places where you learn that you are to submit, to pray for your leaders, to pay your taxes, to respect and honor those in positions of authority.

So those are the two extremes and as we consider those extremes, I want to begin where I often do by helping us understand what this passage does not teach. And so, I do not want to begin with the passage itself, I want to begin with the biblical exceptions to Romans 13.

You see Romans 13 is not all the Bible has to say about government and our response to it. There are biblical exceptions to the requirement here to submit to government. There are biblical grounds to disobey our governmental leaders. You say, "Well Tom why do you want to begin there, why not just walk through the text?" I want to begin here this morning for two reasons, because of those two extremes. I want to begin here because there are some Christians who read Romans 13 and conclude that we owe our government unlimited obedience. And that is simply not true, and you need to know that.

The second reason I want to begin here and start with the exceptions, is that some are going to find it hard to hear what Paul actually says here if I don't start with the exceptions. Because I know what is going to happen. They are going to be sitting there going, "Yea Tom, I know it says that, but what about, and what about, and what about?" So, let's get the "what abouts" off the table so we can then look at what Paul actually says here with an open mind and hearts, alright?

So, let's look then and consider the biblical exceptions. What are the exceptions to submission to government? What are the biblical grounds for disobeying government? What are the primary legitimate ways for us to respond to governmental abuses?

Now we live in a fallen world and while, as we'll see, government is established by God and God uses it for His own purposes, government is far from perfect. In fact it is terribly flawed at its best and therefore, there are and will be abuses. How do we respond to that? This list, by the way, that I am going to give you may not be totally comprehensive, but it does include the primary exceptions to Romans 13.

Let's begin by looking at the legitimate response by individuals to government abuses. Now we are talking about you as an individual Christian. Ok, I am going to look at a different category in a minute, but we are talking about you as an individual Christian. What does the Bible say about how you can

respond when the government abuses its authority? Let's look at them, I'm going to give you a little list here.

First of all, it is ok for you as an individual Christian to acknowledge and to graciously speak against the sins and legal abuse of our leaders. There are countless examples of this in the Old Testament. Of course the Old Testament prophets, as part of the government, assigned by God the responsibility to keep the kings accountable from abusing their authority. They are always speaking this way toward the kings. One good example is [Daniel 5:22-23](#). You remember Daniel, the aging prophet, is called in before Belshazzar the night of the handwriting on the wall to interpret what the writing means. What does Daniel say to Belshazzar? He says:

You, his son, Belshazzar, [even though you know what happened to your grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, you] have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, but you have exalted yourself against the God of heaven; ... you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified.

Daniel said it respectfully, but he said it directly. He spoke the truth and we must as well. In Matthew 23, our Lord does, you remember, with the scribes and Pharisees. There is an entire chapter there where he pronounces woes on the scribes and Pharisees. You say, "Yea Tom, but they were not only political leaders, they were religious leaders." That's true. So, let's look at John the Baptist, in [Mark 6:18](#), "John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'" So here is John the Baptist, speaking out against the sin of someone in Roman government and authority. It is not lawful, it is not permitted, you are breaking the law, it is morally wrong. It is ok for you, believer, to acknowledge in your own heart and even to graciously speak against the sins and legal abuse of leaders.

Secondly, it is ok for you to request a personal exception from an odious law. Daniel does this in Daniel 1. You remember, he has been taken from his homeland, he is now thrust into the court of Nebuchadnezzar. And there he is told that he has to eat food that he was, as a Jewish young man, not permitted to eat. So in [Daniel 1:8](#), Daniel "made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food, or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself." He asked, essentially it is kind of a petition of sorts, "I cannot do that, I am petitioning you in this way." And so, the question is, what would Daniel have done if he had not been granted that petition? I think that answer becomes clear later in Daniel and we will see it in a minute. But he asked for a personal exception from the law and so can you.

Thirdly, and this is a big one, you can use all legal means of redress provided by the existing laws of our country. That means, let me give you a little sub list in terms of what are some of those legal means. First of all, you can lawfully protest unjust or illegal treatment and insist that the country's laws be followed. On what authority do I tell you that? How about the authority of Jesus and the apostle Paul. Let's start with Jesus. In John 18 he is appearing before Annas. A preliminary hearing, you remember, on the night of his arrest. Somewhere in the wee hours of the morning he had a preliminary hearing before Annas, the former high priest and member of the Sanhedrin. And in that hearing Annas essentially tried to get Jesus to incriminate Himself. He asked Him to testify about Himself and to present self-incriminating facts. Here was Jesus' response, this is [John 18:21-23](#):

"Why do you question Me? [now sometimes you can read that and think Jesus is saying 'Don't ask me; ask others.' No, he is saying more than that. He is saying this is illegal, what you are doing is a breach of Jewish law, you are not to ask someone who is being condemned of a crime to incriminate himself. Instead] Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; [you are supposed to be asking witnesses, not me] they know what I said." When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike me?"

Again, Jesus is saying that is illegal under Jewish law. You don't strike a man who is uncondemned, that is wrong. If I said something wrong, tell me what it was. But either way you don't have the legal right to strike me. That is what Jesus was saying. He was appealing to existing law.

Paul does the same thing on several occasions. You remember in Acts 16 when he was unjustly arrested and beaten in Philippi, and you remember he spent the night in jail chained up. And he and Silas are

singing; there is an earthquake; they are set free; the Philippian jailer comes to faith in Christ. Well the next morning the authorities hear about all of this and they hear a little more about Paul and they want to kind of just sweep this thing under the rug, that they have acted illegally. Paul is having none of it. This is [Acts 16:37](#): "Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? [*I don't think so*]... let them come themselves and bring us out.'" Now Paul isn't just being belligerent here, all he is doing is insisting that the law be followed. The law had been breached. This was illegal, and he wants to call attention to it. Why? He wants to call attention to it for the sake of those new believers in Philippi so they will not be mistreated. He is protecting them. But nevertheless he uses and appeals to the law. The same thing happened when he was unlawfully threatened with punishment, contrary to Roman law. You remember when that whole debacle happened at the temple when he returned to Jerusalem in the book of Acts. In [Acts 22:25](#), because of all that had happened, "they stretched [Paul] out with thongs, [*in other words, they are tying him up to beat him and*] Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?'" Paul is saying this is illegal; what you are doing here is illegal, it is not lawful, it is not right. He appealed to the law. The same thing happened at a hearing before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23. He was unlawfully struck at that hearing and in [Acts 23:3](#) Paul said to the one who had been instructed that he be hit, "...do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" He says you are acting like you are trying to keep the Law but in reality, you just broke the Law yourself by ordering me to be struck contrary to Jewish Law. I haven't been condemned. You have no right to do this. So Paul used the law.

It is ok, Christian, on the authority of Jesus and the apostle Paul, for you to lawfully protest unjust or illegal treatment and insist that the law be followed. Part of using the legal means that are available to you includes the use of the judicial system, the use of the judicial system to pursue justice and the following of the countries laws. Paul did this as well. In Acts 25, you remember he is standing before a Roman court and, in an effort to sort of just get rid of the problem, he is told, "Listen we are just going to hand you over to the Jewish authorities and they will sort this out." Paul, says, no that is not right. This is [Acts 25:10-11](#): *Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. [I'm a Roman.] I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. If then [so he says, listen you know this is unjust. If then] I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me to them. I appeal to Caesar."* He was saying, listen I am going to use the judicial system in order to seek justice. It is ok for us to do the same, to use the judicial system to pursue justice.

In our system, unlike the Roman system, we can add a couple more to this. We can use the legislature to change the laws of the country, and we can use the voting box to replace politicians responsible for unjust or illegitimate laws. So, we can use the existing laws of the land; that is acceptable.

Let me move on to a fourth response for individuals to governmental abuses. That is we can flee unlawful and unjust arrest and punishment. That is acceptable for believers to do. Jesus told His disciples to do this in [Matthew 10:23](#). He said, "Whenever they [*that is the religious authorities of the town, specifically the synagogue; whenever they*] persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes." He is saying, listen you have a right to flee from unjust, illegal, arrest, and punishment. Jesus Himself did that, you remember in John 11.

After the raising of Lazarus they decided they were going to kill Jesus. This is what we read in [John 11:53-54](#),

From that day on they planned together to kill him. Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with His disciples.

He fled the threat of death, He knew the authorities had commanded that He be turned over and yet He did not allow that to happen, He went into hiding because the time was not right. But He would not be subject to unlawful and unjust arrest and punishment. The apostle Paul did the same thing in [Acts 9:23-25](#). It says:

When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but

his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

It is ok for Christians to flee unlawful and unjust arrest and punishment.

Number five, and this is the one you expected, and I have gotten there: disobey the government only when they require you to break God's law. Now this isn't something that is doubtful, it's not questionable. We are talking chapter and verse. Like you can show me in your Bible where it says God forbids that or commands that. And you are required to do so with the right spirit and with a willingness to patiently suffer the consequences of your disobedience just as Jesus did, committing Himself to Him who judges righteously. When He was reviled, He reviled not again, but committed Himself to the Righteous Judge. You know these texts but turn there with me. [Acts 4:18](#) says that the Sanhedrin summoned the disciples, the apostles, together and "they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." So here is a government command that is in direct contradiction to the command that Jesus had given to them explicitly. How did they respond? Verse 19, "Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" Now just in case that wasn't clear enough, let's look at chapter 5. Of course they went out and kept on preaching and so in chapter 5 verse 28 they bring them back, the council does, and the high priest says to them listen, this is chapter 5 verse 28: "'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name ... yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'"

Listen, if government at any level commands you to do what God forbids or forbids you to do what God commands, then you must obey God rather than men. You are to do so with the right spirit, and you are to do so with respectful speech. But disobey you must.

There are, of course, many examples in Scripture. Let me give you a couple. There is Exodus 1, you remember the Jewish midwives. [Exodus 1:16-17](#). Pharaoh said, "'When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.' But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live." If they had put those boys to death it would have been a breach of the law of God. They had to obey God rather than man.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in Daniel 3, you remember, were told by Nebuchadnezzar to bow down and worship in front of the golden image that he had built. In [Daniel 3:18](#) they said "...let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.'" And of course, Daniel himself in [Daniel 6:10](#). You remember the story how those who resented him and his leadership conspired together and convinced King Darius that he should pass a law that all prayers for the next period of time should be prayed through him as the intermediary—to him and ultimately through him—to the gods and he went along with it, flattered by it. And [Daniel 6:10](#) says: "...when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." Believer, it is perfectly legitimate for you to disobey the government, if the government is asking you to do what God forbids or forbidding you from doing what God commands.

Now do you notice, those are the exceptions given to individuals. I think because we live in what has now become a democracy we are tempted to think our authority goes beyond that. I can't tell you how many times I hear Christians say, "Well, I'm not going to do that because it's unconstitutional." Well, God didn't give you the authority to decide whether that law is constitutional. Neither does our constitution, by the way. It gives the Supreme Court that authority. Ultimately the only right you have is, if the Supreme Court comes down on it and it is contrary to God's law, then you can disobey it. But if you don't like it then you just have to lump it and move on. Just because we live in what has now become a democracy doesn't mean that God has given you as an individual authority over those in authority. And when you carry out these exceptions, they have to be done without sinning in your speech or in your attitude. If you want to know how to do this, read Daniel. What a classic example of a guy who knew how to do this in a way that still honored God in his demeanor.

So real quickly, let's look at a second category: the legitimate response by subordinate authorities in government to government abuses. So now I am talking about those who are in authority at some level in government. Not the President, but somewhere down the chain. They have duties as well, beyond our individual duties. The reformers and the Puritans used to refer to these as the lesser magistrates. That is, they have authority, God-given authority, as we will learn in Romans 13, but it is not the highest authority. But I believe that these lesser magistrates, these lower government officials, have responsibilities beyond that that you and I have as individual citizens. Because they have been placed by God, ultimately, again as Romans 13 tells us, into positions of human authority in government. And therefore, they serve as ministers of God. So, if you serve in government in any capacity, all the way up through, then these are how you ought to respond when there are governmental abuses.

First of all, obviously, you can use all the means available to individuals. You are still an individual, so you can use all of those we just talked about.

In addition, secondly, you can disobey when laws or executive orders will unjustly cause the death of innocents and there are no other means to deal with it. Esther is a great example of this. In [Esther 4:15-16](#), you remember, Esther said to Mordecai, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. [And] I and my maidens will also fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, [*listen to this*] which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." Why would she break the law? Because she was trying to save, from a genocide, she was trying to save the Jewish people. You know what this tells us? This tells us that if you are in a position of authority in the government, you can never take the Nazi defense at the Nuremberg trials, 'I was just following orders.'

Thirdly, if you are in a subordinate position of authority, you may disobey when the laws or executive orders are contrary to the law of the land. Not just contrary to God's law but contrary to the law of the land. Why? Because those in lower positions of authority have either taken an actual or implied oath to uphold the law of the land, to do justice, and to protect the people they serve. And that takes precedence over an illegal or unjust ruler or law.

Number four: they can resist with force an unlawful, internal, takeover of the government; in other words, a coup. Those in lower positions of authority have, I believe, a compelling responsibility to respond to that and make sure the legitimate government remains in power.

Number five: remove, with force if necessary, any government official seeking to replace the current government and its laws. In other words, if someone comes to power and decides to change the whole system – they are just going to remake it – and in that case those in lower levels of responsibility have a responsibility before God, because of this actual or implied oath to the laws of the land and to its people, to intervene.

Now I know I just kind of went through those quickly, but I just wanted to bring them to your attention. But I want you to look at the two lists I have given you. Biblically those are the exceptions to our required submission to government. But, please be careful. Yes these are exceptions; you can use them. But just like when using a knife you have to be careful not to cut yourself in the process. I did that this week right here on my wrist.

As you think about and weigh the exceptions for submitting to government, make sure that you guard, first of all, your attitude. Yes, those are exceptions. But if your attitude is wrong you are sinning. [Titus 3:1-2](#) (we will look at this in more detail in weeks to come) says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, [*this is still talking about our response to those in leadership*] to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration [*or courtesy*] for all men." If your attitude toward local, state, and federal government officials is not one of honor and respect, you are sinning against God. If, even in pursuing these legitimate exceptions, your speech or your attitude or your posts are characterized by viciousness or constant suspicion and disrespect, you are sinning against those officials and you are sinning ultimately against God Himself, who as we will learn in Romans 13 is behind all human authority. He is more than capable of dealing with rogues.

Also, be careful of your focus. It's interesting that while the Bible contains legitimate exceptions, as we have seen, to the command to submit to government, not one of the three primary New Testament passages about our response to government gives one of those exceptions. It doesn't mean there aren't

exceptions, but it does mean that the limited number of exceptions and the relative obscurity of most of them only serve to magnify the rule of submission. And doesn't that make sense? I mean think about this with me. What would you think – really think about this for a moment – what would you think of a Christian wife who spent most of her marriage researching the biblical grounds for not submitting to her husband and the biblical grounds for divorce? What if she talked about those biblical exceptions all the time? What if the websites she read and gravitated to online were about the biblical grounds for not submitting to your husband? What if most of her posts championed her right not to submit and her right to divorce? What is wrong with that? I mean if it's what the Scriptures teaches, she's not technically wrong. So why do we instinctively know that shouldn't happen? Because it is a desperately wrong focus. If she is dominated by the exceptions, then she has missed the entire point of what the Bible teaches about the priority of marriage.

The same thing is true, sadly, about many Christians when it comes to their submission to government. They spend all of their time reading about, thinking about, meditating on, fostering those exceptions; working themselves up. Folks, those are the exceptions, not the rule.

Paul, in Romans 13, focuses guess where? On the biblical rule. Let's look at it together briefly. Look at [Romans 13:1](#), "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." Every person. Literally in Greek, *every soul*. That is a Hebrew expression which means every single individual without exception. Believer or unbeliever, doesn't matter. Every soul. And then look at the word *authorities*. Just like in English, the word *authority* can be used of the possession of power. Or it can be used of the one who exercises that power or authority, which is how it is used here in the plural.

Some say, "Well, these authorities in verse 1, they are like spiritual authorities – demons and angels." Because this word is used that way in some texts in the New Testament. Can't be here because in verse 3 he explains what he is talking about: talking about rulers who deal with human beings. So these authorities are rulers who hold positions in government. Josephus uses this word of the Roman authorities in Judea. Now why does he call them the *governing authorities*? The word *governing* simply means *those who are over*. Those who are in a position, over believers to whom he writes, in positions of governmental authority. These are government officials at all levels. It's like [1 Peter 2:13-14](#), "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king [*there's the supreme*] as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him..." In our own political context this passage includes the President, the Executive Branch, Congress, judges, governors, mayors, and policemen, and the whole gamut.

Now notice he does not say only submit to the good and righteous and respectable. And by the way, this doesn't mean, again, that the government should overlook injustice. They should deal with that. We'll talk about that at a later time. But in terms of our response, it doesn't say we are only to submit to the good and the righteous and respectable. In fact, John Calvin puts it this way, "We are not only subject to the authority of princes, who perform their office toward us uprightly and faithfully as they ought, but also to the authority of all who perform not a whit of the prince's office. They who rule unjustly and incompetently have been raised up by God to punish the wickedness of the people. A wicked man should be held in the same reverence and esteem by his subjects, insofar as public obedience is concerned, in which they would hold the best of kings if he were given to them."

The Greek word translated *be in subjection* there in verse 1 means *to willingly submit to another, to recognize their authority over you*. It's a military word that is often used in the context of how those who are lower in rank respond to those who are higher in rank. The word itself doesn't mean *to obey* but it's often connected to obedience, as it is even in [Titus 3:1](#).

There are two other New Testament texts that teach this priority: [Titus 3:1-2](#) and [1 Peter 2:13-17](#). We will look at both of those again more in detail in weeks to come.

Look again at chapter 13 verse 1, "Every [soul] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." How do you know if that's true of you? Let me just give you a little test and I challenge you to take this test like I took it this week, ok? If your kids, and if you don't have kids, imagine for a moment you did, ok? If your kids spoke to you and about you the way you speak to and about the government, would you be happy with their submission to your authority? If your kids had the attitude toward you and your authority that you have toward the government would you say that they are truly biblically submissive? If your kids acted towards you the way you act toward the government, would you say they have a submissive heart

toward your authority. If you have to honestly say the answer to those questions is *no*, then understand this: you don't have a submissive heart toward the government that God Himself established and you are living in a consistent pattern of unrepentant sin.

Let me challenge us all, as we go through this passage together, to ask the Lord to speak to us through His word and challenge us so that we intentionally think like Christians, not like the people around us.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for the truth of Your word. Lord give us submissive hearts, speak to us, O Lord, and may we hear and respond. Forgive us for countenancing dishonor and disrespect. Lord, I pray that You would help us to understand the exceptions, to take them when we need to, but to do so with the right spirit, with the right disposition, and still with honor and respect in our hearts. Father, I pray that as we go through this passage You would instruct us, help us to learn, both our sins and to repent and turn from them, and to learn Your intention and purpose behind even the flawed and fallen government under which we live. Thank You that, as inadequate as it is, it is still Your gift to us to protect us from what would happen if there were no government. We thank You for Your blessing. Give us hearts to receive. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

A Gospel Response to Government - Part 2

Tom Pennington • Romans 13:1-7

So, I invite you to turn with me to Romans 13 as we continue our study of Paul's letter to the Romans. By last count there are approximately 195 nations that exist in our world today. Of course, that seems to change to some degree rather frequently. But all 195 of those nations have governments. Where did these concepts of *nation* and *government* come from? In political theory this is called the origin of the state. It answers the question, "Where did the state originate?" Now there are a number of theories out there, far more than I can recount to you in just a couple of minutes here. But let me just give you sort of the leading contenders in today's world. Here are the theories of the origin of the state.

First of all, there is the Evolutionary or Patriarchal Theory. This theory goes like this. Originally, the head of each family was the government. And eventually those families evolved into a network of families and related clans. They lived on one piece of land. And one person or family dominated the leadership of that clan. And this created the state. That is one theory of the origin of the state.

A second theory is the Force Theory. That is that one person or one group claimed control over an area, and then forced everyone living in that area to submit to their rule. And that is how the concept of government originated.

A third view is the Divine Right Theory. This was popular in the 15th to 18th centuries. And there is a measure of truth to it, as we will see. But I think it goes beyond what Scripture teaches. And that is that God created the state, which I will argue is exactly what Romans 13 says. But they go on to say, in addition God chose individuals for royal birth. And in choosing those individuals for royal birth, he granted them the divine right to rule.

A fourth theory is the Social Contract Theory. This was the prevailing theory in the formation of our own country. It was championed by Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau. The Social Contract theory says that people collectively agree on a contract, in our case the constitution, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all of those who collectively joined themselves. In this view, government's authority originates with the consent of the governed.

A fifth view that is gaining in popularity is the Marxist Theory. Now it is not gaining popularity under that label. You will instead hear it discussed in leading institutions – in fact I read just this week of one of the nation's leading institutions whose major emphasis in their doctrinal program is this Marxist Theory – under the name the Critical Theory. Or, it's sometimes even called the Critical Race Theory. This theory says that here's how governments came to be: There was one class who controlled the economics, who controlled the mode of production, and they established the state. They established government to guarantee their continued power over the other classes. The state then, in this theory, is merely an instrument of domination and oppression by one class over the other classes.

Those are the prevailing theories of the origin of the state, of government, that are alive in our institutions of higher education today.

Today in Romans 13 we will discover that in one brief sentence Paul tells us the origin of the state. Now let me remind you that we are looking at chapter 13:1-7 which is a gospel response to government. As Paul ends his letter, he is dealing with how we ought to respond to the gospel that we have come to believe. And in very practical ways he is helping us learn the implications of that gospel in our lives. And one implication has to do with our response to government. Let's read it together [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. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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; 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. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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.

The theme of this paragraph is the very first sentence. "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." Now as I noted for you last time the reason this paragraph is here, is back in chapter 12 verse 19, Paul says that we should never respond to the evil done against us with personal vengeance. In chapter 13 he tells us instead, we are to trust God to bring about justice. And often, not always – God will always bring about justice in His time and way, it may be in this life, it may be in eternity – but often, God brings about justice and punishes those who do evil through the governing authorities.

Now this paragraph begins as I noted for you last time with a universal command to submit to government. Last week you will remember we began by stepping away from Romans 13 and considering what the Bible teaches elsewhere about the biblical exceptions to this submission. Let me just remind you those exceptions fall into two categories. First of all, there is the legitimate response by individuals to government abuses. We can acknowledge and graciously speak against the sins and legal abuse of leaders. We can request, as Daniel did, a personal exception from the law. We can use all legal means provided within the law. That is, as I noted for you, we can lawfully protest unjust or illegal treatment. We can use the judicial system. We can use the legislature to change unjust laws. We can use the voting box to replace politicians who are responsible for unjust or illegitimate laws. We are also allowed by Scripture to flee unlawful and unjust arrest and punishment, as Jesus did and as Paul did. And the big one, the one that is the prevailing point here, is: we must disobey the government, but only when they require you to break God's law. And we looked at those passages at length.

We also looked last week at the legitimate response by subordinate authorities. That is those who are in positions of authority in government: how they should respond to government abuses. And I am not going to go through those again. If you weren't here last week you can go back and listen online and catch up. But those are the biblical exceptions to our required submission to government. But as I warned you last time, we have to be so careful with these exceptions. Because our sinful hearts don't like to submit to any authority. And therefore, we could easily try to justify our lack of submission with a reason that is really just an excuse. Even if you use a legitimate exception, I noted for you last time, make sure that you display godly and respectful attitudes in the process of that. And that you don't so over emphasize the exceptions that you fail to focus on the clear-cut biblical rule of submission and respect.

So those are the exceptions. We looked then at the first line in this paragraph, the biblical rule. "Every person [verse 1 says] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." Every person is literally *every soul*. It means every person without exception, believers and unbelievers. The Greek word *be in subjection* means to willingly submit to another, to recognize their authority over you. It is a military word often used in the context of those who respond to those who are higher in the command structure. That is how we are to respond to government officials at all levels, federal, state, and local, from president to law enforcement officers.

Now that brings us today then, from the universal command to the reasons: the reasons to submit to government. Paul begins – having made the command, the first part of verse 1 – he begins then down through verse 6 to lay out a series of reasons. Notice he begins there in verse 1 after the command with the word *for*. *Because*. Here are the reasons that you ought to be in subjection to your government. So, let's look at these reasons together. The first reason is this: God established the principle and structures of all human authority. Look at verse 1, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God,..." Now notice a change. In the first sentence of chapter 13 there is the plural, *authorities*. In the second sentence he changes to the singular noun, *authority*. Now that could mean one of two things. It could mean he is saying there is not an individual ruler whose authority does not come from God. That is possible and is what some commentators believe. And that is true, by the way, as we are going to see in the very next clause. But this approach makes the last clause in verse 1 a tautology, that is a pointless repetition of the second clause. More likely that center sentence in verse 1 is making its own separate point. If so, here's what Paul is saying, and this is what I believe he is saying: authority itself, that is, the basic principle of human authority, and all of its various structures come from God. God has established all human authority. Now to help us understand this, let me break it down a bit into its constituent parts. So first of all, when we say this, when it comes to this principle of authority, we are saying first of all that God is the only true

and ultimate authority. God alone inherently possesses the right and power to command the thoughts, opinions, and behavior of His creatures. [2 Chronicles 20:6](#) says "O Lord, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You." God's universal authority flows from creation. Think of it this way, if you create something, unless you intentionally sign away your rights, it is yours. And you can do with it whatever you choose. When Sheila and I wrote our first hymn, "Our Sovereign God," we chose to partner with LifeWay Music and to sign away our rights to that song to them. So, we no longer have control of it, ultimately, they do. There are certain things they allow us to do with it. But ultimately, they have control of it. The subsequent songs we have written, we have not signed such an agreement. We have retained control of them. Why? Because we created them, and it is our right to do with them as we please, unless we sign those rights away.

Because God created all things, He owns all things. [Psalm 24:1](#), "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it." In other words, not only the stuff that's in the world but the people that are in the world are His. Why? By virtue of the fact that He created them. And as owner, He has the right or power over all He made, including the nations and their rulers. You heard just a moment ago in [2 Chronicles 20:6](#), "Are you not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations?" Or look at [Psalm 47:7-8](#) "...God is the King of all the earth...God reigns over the nations..." And sweeping in its scope is [Psalm 103:19](#) "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all." Because God created all things, He owns all things. Because He owns all things, God can do what he chooses with what He has made. This is a clear point in Scripture. [Psalm 135:6](#) "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." Don't misunderstand, that's not teaching that God is capricious, that God just sort of on a whim does things. No; God has a great eternal, all wise and good plan. The point is, He has the right to do that. Because he created it, He owns it. [Daniel 4:35](#), "...He does according to His will in the host of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" So, God is the only true, ultimate authority over all things.

A second biblical proposition about this principle of authority is that God has delegated limited authority to people; limited authority. We saw that even last week with the exceptions when it comes to government. God has delegated limited authority to people. And why has he done this? Well, because our God is a God of order. In fact, throughout His creation God has ordained that there be order and structure. Have you ever thought about this? Even among the holy angels, and they're perfect, it's not like they need to be brought into line, but there is order and structure. There are angels who are over other angels. There is a command structure. Why? Because that is a reflection of the character of God Himself.

God is also determined to establish different levels of authority among humans; submission and authority among mankind. He did so for our benefit, as an expression of His goodness. Why are there these structures of human authority? Well, there are several purposes. As we will see even in Romans 13 they serve the purpose to restrain and to punish sin. Can you imagine a world in which there is no authority? I mean frankly, if you are a parent imagine a home in which there is no authority, where the two-year-old reigns. To restrain and punish sin.

Secondly, to encourage righteousness. To promote good and wellbeing. God is good to all of His creatures and He desires their good. And so God has put these structures of human authority in place to promote our good and wellbeing, our Shalom as the Old Testament would say it. And God has put these structures of human authority in place to serve as a reminder, a constant reminder, of His own authority and our accountability to Him. I can't tell you how many times I have said to our kids as they were growing up, "Listen I'm not telling you this because I'm bigger, stronger, or smarter than you are. I am telling you this because God created parents and He created children. And He established the structure and put me over you. And so, this isn't about you and me; this is about you and God. In obeying me you're choosing whether or not you are going to obey God, who has every right to tell you what to do." So, authority reminds us of God's authority and our accountability to Him.

Now to accomplish those ends, God has established several kinds of human authority. In fact, it's interesting. This word in verse 1, *be in subjection to*, it's used, and I'm not going to take you to every passage, but it's used of each of these kinds or structures of authority I am about to share with you.

God has delegated limited authority to human beings primarily in four areas. First of all, God gave husbands authority within marriage. I'm not going to look at all those texts, you're familiar with this. But [Ephesians 5:22](#) says "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." The word that's used in that context is the same word that's used in Romans 13.

God, secondly, gave parents authority over their children. God delegated limited authority to parents over their children. [Ephesians 6:1-3](#), "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise)..." This is by God's design.

Thirdly, God gave elders authority over the function and membership of the local church. [Acts 20:28](#). Paul is talking here to the elders of the church of Ephesus and he says, "Be on guard for yourselves [*now listen to this*] and for all the flock, among [whom] the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." He's made you overseers. In [1 Thessalonians 5:12](#) he says, "...appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction." [Hebrews 13:17](#), "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." And so, God has given limited authority in each of those contexts.

Now there is a fourth and this is really the focus this morning. God gave human government authority over its citizens. Clearly, you understand, that Paul's primary focus in Romans 13 is this authority that God has delegated to civil government. So, look again at verse 1. When Paul says, "there is no authority except from God," he really isn't primarily talking about all of those other structures of human authority, he's primarily talking about this fourth one. He's saying, there is no governmental authority – governmental authority doesn't exist except from God. Scripture clearly teaches that God ordained human government. And He established it, in basic principle, after the flood. You see, get this in your mind, God created nations.

Let me show you this. Go back to Genesis 9. After the flood God says this to Noah and his family, to his sons. He says, this is [Genesis 9:5](#), "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it... from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." God says, listen the life of man is so precious and it's such a reflection of my image, that to attack the image is to attack me and I will not tolerate it. Therefore, anyone who commits an act of murder is to face the ultimate penalty of the taking of his own life. The question is, by whom? Who is to carry out this command? Well in the very next chapter, Genesis 10, you have the table of nations. In fact, in Genesis 10 you have the first use in the Bible of the word *nation*. Look at chapter 10:5, "From these the coastlands of the nations [*there's the first mention*] were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations." Go down to verse 20 as he talks about the different sons of Noah. He says, and "These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations." Go down to verse 31, "These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations. These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these [*notice this*] the nations were separated on the earth after the flood."

Now the change that we just read about in chapter 10 was brought about by the events that happened in chapter 11. You see it's not chronological here. Chapter 11 and the events of the tower of Babel happened before this dividing of the nations. It was brought about by what happened in chapter 11. In fact, look at 11:8-9. After what happened at the tower of Babel, "...the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; ...they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth." So, understand then, that God is the one who created the concept of the nation state. And He did so deliberately for His own purposes. This is stated elsewhere, for example [Deuteronomy 32:8](#), Moses writes, "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples..." Do you hear what Moses is saying? He is saying not only did God create nations, dwelling in their own lands, but He even established their physical boundaries. I don't have time to take you to Acts 17 but you remember in his sermon at Mars Hill in [Acts 17:24-26](#) Paul says, not only has God established nations, and not only has He

established the physical boundaries that they would have throughout their history, but He also established the very time of their existence: when they would begin and when they would end. So, God created nations.

More importantly for our study in Romans 13, God gave the government of nations their authority or their right to rule. I want you to turn back with me to Daniel, to Daniel's prophecy. And if you haven't worked your way through Daniel with us, it's been one of the richest studies of my own life and I think of those who have been a part of our Sunday nights together. You can go online and catch up. But walking through Daniel has been so important to understanding these basic principles. But look at [Daniel 4:17](#). Here is what Nebuchadnezzar was told, "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, [*and here's why God was going to do what He was saying He was going to do to Nebuchadnezzar*] in order that the living may know that the Most High [*I love that expression, El Elyon, the Highest One, the One above whom there is nobody else. The Most High*] is ruler over the realm of mankind, and [He] bestows it on whom He wishes and [He] sets over it the lowliest of men." God at times puts over nations not those who are worthy of that role, but those who are the least worthy. Go over to chapter 5:18, and let's start in verse 17 and get a running start here. Daniel you remember is brought in to that feast of Belshazzar after it's interrupted by the hand writing on the wall telling him that something terribly supernatural is going to happen to him and his kingdom. And he wants to understand it, so he brings Daniel in. And Daniel, before he explains the writing, preaches him a sermon and he says to him in [Daniel 5:17](#),

Then Daniel answered and said before [Belshazzar], "Keep you gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known... O king, the Most High God granted [notice this, El Elyon, the Most High, granted] sovereignty, grandeur, [power] and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar your father. Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and men of every language feared and trembled before him; whom[ever] he wished he killed and whomever he wished he spared alive; ...whomever he wished he elevated and whomever he wished he humbled. But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, [by the way that's why I was praying this morning for the humility of our leaders, God hates pride anywhere it's found, including in our leaders. And he says when his heart was lifted up he behaved arrogantly] he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like that of beasts, and his dwelling place was with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, ... his body ... drenched with the dew of heaven [notice this] until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes."

Douglas Moo writes in his commentary on Romans 13, commenting on passages like these and others and specifically Romans 13, "From a human perspective rulers come to power through force, or heredity, or popular choice. But the transformed mind recognizes behind every such process is the hand of God."

Jesus affirmed this, didn't He? He affirmed the God-given authority of both Caesar and Pilate.

In [Matthew 22:21](#) regarding paying Roman taxes, Jesus said, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; [*I am acknowledging, He said, that Caesar has rightful authority. And therefore, you ought to submit to him as that rightful authority*] and to God the things that are God's." In [John 19:11](#) you remember, Jesus stood before Pilate at his trial and Pilate says, 'Don't you realize – why aren't you talking to me? Why aren't you telling me what your thoughts are? I have the authority to do away with you; take your life.' And Jesus said this to him, this is to Pilate, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above..."

In [Romans 13:3-8](#), twice Paul calls rulers *ministers of God*. And once he calls them *servants of God*. So, folks, understand this: there is absolutely no question that God in eternity past decided to institute human government. Government, again please listen to me, government does not exist, it did not originate by evolutionary process, by force, by social contract, or by a human desire to oppress others. It was ordained by God. John Murray writes, "This passage expressly excludes, from the outset, every notion to the effect that authority in the state rests upon agreement on the part of the governed, or upon the consent of the governed. Authority to govern and the subjection demanded of the governed reside wholly in the fact of the divine institution."

All government – whether it is totalitarian, like that of Nebuchadnezzar, or whether it is democratic, whether it is monarchy or oligarchy – all government is established by God. That doesn't mean, as we will discover next time, that God approves of all government or all governmental rulers. But the principle of governmental authority is established by God. The principle of human authority over other humans and the structures of that authority – in the family, in the church, in the state – they are not human inventions to be tolerated. They are divine blessings to be embraced. Of course, some governments are better than others. Some governmental leaders are more respectable and carry out their duties more capably than others. But government, our government, with all of its flaws, is divinely created for our wellbeing and safety. Because even bad government is better than no government.

Look again at chapter 13:1. Here's the command, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. [*And what's the first reason?*] For there is no authority except from God." God established the principle and structures of all human authority, including government.

My question to you this morning, and I want you to answer this honestly in your heart, is: Do you believe that? And if you believe that, are you thinking and acting like you believe that. That is what Paul is calling us to do here.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You for Your great truth. We praise You that You are the King of the nations. We thank You that you established the principle of authority built on Your own authority. And You delegated limited authority to human beings, not for our detriment but for our blessing. Lord, we recognize that in a fallen world there are many who don't manage their authority well, who even abuse their authority. And yet, Father, we thank You for the blessing that it is to us as we live on this planet. Help us to think and speak and act like those who have a transformed mind. Who have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. So that this, what we are learning in Romans 13, is our response to government. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

A Gospel Response to Government - Part 3

Tom Pennington • Romans 13:1-7

I invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to Romans 13. And as you are turning, I want to share something with you. A couple of weeks ago in our elders meeting Eric Weathers, who is a part of our church and also very much involved in the training academy, The Masters Academy International. Where graduates from the Masters Seminary mostly, go to various places around the world and equip and train indigenous pastors for ministry, teach them how to preach expositionally, how to serve their flock. He is very much involved in that and he brought us a gift from the ministry in Europe, specifically, in Germany. A dear friend of mine heads that ministry, Christian Andreason. And a number of, I guess, a couple of years ago now, I don't remember exactly. Was it a year ago that we looked at partnering with them for the translation of this? [*a voice from the congregation, a year and a half ago*] A year and a half ago, see I'm terrible with time. But a year and a half ago the elders agreed that we wanted to support the translation of the MacArthur and Mayhue systematic theology into German. There are a number of systematic theologies available there in Germany. But most of them are liberal and those that aren't are not really usable for the average pastor. And so, they really wanted this work to be available there. It has now been translated and printed and Christian sent us, via Eric, a copy in leather of the systematic theology. As you can see you almost need like a wheelbarrow to carry it. But it's all there and it's very well done. It's, I have just enough German to be dangerous and I am grateful for the fact that the Lord allowed us as a church to partner with the ministry there to see a good systematic theology put in the hands of pastors, church leaders, and even lay people in Germany and everywhere German is spoken. So, I just wanted you to be aware of that. And to celebrate with us the completion of that in German. It will be around somewhere, not after the service probably, but we'll display it somewhere on campus so you will get a chance to see it. But I wanted you to be aware of that. And thanks Eric for bringing that to us.

Well, let's again, turn to Romans 13 and continue our study of this wonderful and very appropriate chapter. I think you understand that when you look at biblical history, the darkest time in Israel's history was about a 300-year span that was the period of the Judges. That period was described for us in the Book of Judges as well as in the Book of Ruth. There was no central government in Israel. There was no national leader. Each tribe had its own de facto government. They were often at war with each other. And often they were at war within their own tribe. It was a time of widespread apostasy, of great degeneracy, morally, as well as recurring and deepening cycles of divine judgment. And the chief characteristic of that period is described in several places in the Book of Judges. One of those is [Judges 17:6](#), where we read this "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did [*did what*] what was right in his own eyes." What you and I have to understand is that left to ourselves without the restraint of human government, this entire planet would look like the period of the Judges. In Romans 13 Paul is explaining to us that government, even bad government, is better than no government. The radicals in our country who are advocating anarchy and the destruction of authority, frankly they need to get out a little more. They need to read history. They need to just look around our world at those countries where there is little or no government and ask themselves if that is really what they want.

The truth is, and this is what we are learning in Romans 13, is government is God's gracious way of protecting us from a world and from a society in which man's fallenness is given free reign. This is part of the gospel's response to government that we are learning. In [Romans 13:1-7](#), that's really the theme of this paragraph, it is a reminder that for those of us who have been justified, for those of us who have embraced the gospel who have been transformed by the work of the spirit, we respond to government in the way that God would want us to. In the way that Christ wants us to. It is a gospel response to government. It's described here in these seven verses, let's read them again together [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. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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; 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. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only*

because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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.

This paragraph begins in the very first sentence with a universal command to submit to government. In fact, the first sentence states the theme of this paragraph. Notice verse 1, "Every person, [*literally in Greek, every soul, every human being without exception*] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." The Greek word translated "be in subjection" means "to willingly submit to another," to recognize their authority over you. There is the universal command. Now beginning after that sentence and running all the way down through verse 6 Paul provides for us the reasons that we are to submit to government. You'll notice the little word "for" in the middle of verse 1, that introduces a series of several reasons for obeying this command to submit to government. We've considered the first reason. It is that God established the principles and structures of all human authority. That's the message notice of the second sentence of verse 1, "For there is no authority except from God," God is the only true ultimate authority and God has delegated limited authority to people on this planet for its order and its wellbeing. Paul's primary focus here in [Romans 13](#) is the authority that God has delegated to humans as involved in civil government. We learned that God created nations, that's not a human construct, nations are not formed by a social contract. Rather, God created nations beginning back in Genesis right after the flood. And He gave the governments of those nations' their authority, or their right to rule. So, government then, is not a human construct. It is not a social contract. It is a divine mandate.

Now today we come to a second reason that we are to submit to government. And it is this, God has appointed all who currently occupy positions of authority in government. Look again at verse 1. By the way, let me just tell you that we are not going to go this slowly through the rest of these verses. These initial statements are absolutely foundational to grasp and understand. Look at verse 1 again, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and [*now notice the last part of verse 1*] and those which exist are established by God." "Those which exist" is literally in Greek "the ones being." Now this expression "those which exist" so "the ones being," could possibly refer to several different things. And different interpreters have landed on one of these options throughout the centuries since this was written.

The ones which exist could refer to the various forms of government. Such as monarchies, democracies, oligarchies, in other words the different kinds of governments that exist have been established by God. A second option is the different levels of government within a given country have been established by God. In our case, of course, that would be the federal, the state, and the local governments.

A third option is that Paul means that the various positions in a particular government. Such as again, in the U.S., this would be the office of president, the members of congress, judges, governors, etc.

A fourth options is that when he says those that exist or which exist, he is referring to the specific individuals who occupy those positions in government. In our case, President Trump, Chief Justice Roberts, Senator McConnell, House Speaker Pelosi, Governor Abbot, etc.

Now when you look at that little list of options, I think we need to start by acknowledging that biblically it is correct to say that all of those are true. But here, the context implies that Paul is not referring to the first three. He is not referring to the forms of government. He is not referring to the levels within a given government. Or the various positions in government. But rather he is referring here to the individuals who occupy various positions within the government. Why do I say that? Well, look at verse 3. When he comes back to this group, he calls them rulers. He is talking about the people who occupy these positions. Now the verb established there at the end of verse 1, means to bring about order by arranging, appointing, or putting in place. God has established. He has arranged, appointed, or put in place the existing authorities. Notice this has been accomplished by God. This is really an amazing statement. In context this is a categorical assertion. A categorical assertion that God has put in place. He has arranged. He has appointed. He has ordained all of those men and women who currently occupy positions in civil government.

For the Roman Christians who received this letter in the first century, that included the Emperor Nero. It included the individual members of the Roman Senate. It included all of those who held positions across the Roman Empire and its government. This is a sweeping statement. But you need to be really careful.

Because if you are not careful, you can quickly come to some grossly distorted conclusions as a result of what Paul says here. In fact, some have read this verse in Romans 13 and they have thoughtlessly concluded that God either excuses or even affirms such wicked evil rules as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Idi Amin, and Chairman Mao. And of course, we can have a list from today as well.

So, we need to look at this a little more carefully. A little more in the context of what the Scriptures teach. So, let's begin, as we often do, to make sure we understand what Paul does not mean here. Let's clear the rubble from our thinking and make sure we understand what Paul does not mean in this last statement in verse 1.

First of all, it does not mean that God approves of the character of every person in government. God actually holds every individual ruler at every level of government accountable to Himself. In fact, one of the most sobering passages for those who occupy any position of authority in government has to be Daniel 5. Where Daniel shows up in the presence of Belshazzar the king. Here is a pagan king who does not acknowledge the God of heaven. And what does Daniel say to him? [Daniel 5:27](#), "You [*Belshazzar*] have been weighed on the scales and found deficient." God has evaluated you as a person and as a ruler and you don't measure up. And by the way God does that with all rulers. God weighs the character and the character of the rule of even pagan leaders, at every level of government in every government on the planet. And God demands that all rulers be men and women of character and integrity. This is a different message for a different time but if I had time to show you, I would show you some of the character and integrity that leaders even of pagan countries in Old Testament times were supposed to demonstrate. Things like humility before the true God of heaven, morality, honesty, justice, compassion. So, understand then that Paul is not saying that God approves of the character of evil rulers when he says that God has established them in their place.

Secondly, God does not mean here, Paul does not mean under inspiration that God approves of the nature of every person's rule. That is, how they carry out their duties. Look at the constant confrontation of Israel's kings by the Old Testament prophets. Again, and again they show up in the face of the kings of the nation and say you are sinning, you are wrong. They are the voice of God to say, "God disapproves of what you are doing." In fact, one of the most interesting comparisons is to compare Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. Both of them revealing the same truth about a line of empires that would come. You remember the description there. In Daniel 2 you have man's perspective of the human empires that would unfold. And what is it? It's this magnificent statue of a human made up of precious metals. This is how man thinks about his nations and empires. That same set of empires is described in Daniel 7 from God's perspective and they are described as ravenous, wicked, destructive beasts. So, no God does not approve of how those in authority carry out their rule in every case.

Thirdly, Paul does not mean here that God approves of the way every ruler comes to power. God holds Old Testament kings, you remember, there was a span of the Old Testament kings when one after another was assassinated. There was intrigue that led to the new king being in place. And God holds them accountable for the intrigue, for the assassination, for the murder of those before them. So, God certainly does not approve of how every ruler comes to power. And here is where I really want to get, when you look at what Paul is saying here, he is not saying, he does not mean, that God is, notice this word, "immediately" that is without a mediator, without secondary causes, that God is immediately responsible for establishing wicked abusive leaders and ruthless regimes.

Now again, let's think biblically, clearly Scripture teaches that God is sovereign over all the world's kingdoms and its rulers. No one who is in power in human government, is in power apart from His direction or His permission. But when you look at the scope of Scripture you learn that God has allowed Satan to be deeply involved in human government. Let's think about that for a moment. What does the Scriptures say about Satan's role in human government?

First of all, it teaches us that God has allowed Satan for His own purposes and for His own time, to be the God of this world. In [1 John 5:19](#) John writes, "...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

In [John 12:31](#), [John 14:30](#), [John 16:11](#), three separate times John says Satan is the ruler of this world.

In [Revelation 12:9](#) it says, "...Satan deceives the whole world." In [Revelation 20:3](#), [Revelation 20:7](#) and [8](#), it says Satan deceives the nations of the world. So, understand then that as evil reigns on this

planet God, for His own purposes, has allowed Satan to exercise power in this world. He is the god of this world. The ruler of this world.

Secondly, when we think about Satan and his involvement with earthly nations and empires. God has allowed Satan to have limited authority over the kingdoms of this world. Look at Luke 4, you remember in the temptation of Christ, one of the temptations had to do with the kingdoms of this world. Notice verse 5, "And he [*Satan*] led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." One of the other gospel writers say he showed Him not the seedy side of the kingdoms of this world but their glory. "And the devil said to Him, [*verse 6*] I will give you all this domain and its glory; [*Now notice what he says*] for it has been handed over to me, [*that's true*] and I give it to whomever I wish. [*That isn't true*]." Okay, so here Satan says the authority over all of these kingdoms has, for a time, been handed over to me. And Jesus doesn't question that. Instead Jesus doesn't rise to the bait, He doesn't accept the opportunity to skip God's plan and the cross to receive what He is ultimately going to receive by his obedience, the kingdoms of this world. Instead He says no, you are not going to tempt Me to do that. But God has allowed Satan this limited authority.

Thirdly, God has allowed Satan to appoint specific demons to influence earthly rulers, nations, and kingdoms. We have seen this in Daniel chapter 10, I'm not going to take time to walk back through that. If you weren't here, go listen to Daniel 10. Listen to the interchange that happens there between angels and demons as they battle over the nations of the world. But in [Daniel 10:13](#), we read this, "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia [*in context he is talking about a demonic prince, a demon of the kingdom of Persia here is a demon assigned by Satan to the empire of Persia*] was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia." Again, the kings of Persia is a spiritual reference, not the physical kings, but rather the spiritual forces that were dominating the empire of Persia. You understand that Satan is alive and well and very much involved in this world and he has powerful influence through demons he has appointed in every capital of every nation on this planet. Now the good news is, God has not abandoned this world to Satan, He has His angels who are also involved. And that is also part of the point of Daniel 10. God Himself is superintending all of that to accomplish His own purpose. This in other words, the end of the story, isn't in question. But nevertheless, it's important to recognize this reality.

Fourthly, God has allowed Satan to place, to empower, and to use rulers to oppose God and His purposes. Look at [Psalm 2:1](#), "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!" This is ultimately an expression of the fallenness of humankind and its rebellion against God. But it is captured in the nations and the kings of the earth and the rulers uniting together against the Lord and against His Anointed One. In Ezekiel 28, I won't have you turn there, but in Ezekiel 28, you have an interesting passage, beginning in verse 11: where there is a description of the king of Tyre but beginning in verse 11 there is a description of the one behind the king of Tyre who was empowering him, who was using him, who was directing his activity, and when you read that passage it's clearly Satan. Because there are descriptions there that cannot be a description of the king of Tyre. You were in the Eden of God, you were clothed with perfection, you were the covering cherub. And so, clearly there is a description of the fact that behind the earthly human king of Tyre there was a spiritual being, Satan himself, empowering him, using him for his own purposes. And of course, that will ultimately be fulfilled with the anti-Christ, one of the greatest rulers in terms of worldwide authority that will ever live. In [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#) and [9](#) it says. "Then that lawless one will be revealedwho's coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders."

So, for now, our Lord had chosen to allow Satan power over the world system and the nations of our world. So, the last sentence in verse 1 does not mean that God is immediately, that is without a mediator, responsible for establishing wicked rulers and ruthless regimes. He has Satan on a leash, and He allows him to have that influence.

So then, having considered what Paul doesn't mean, lets then quickly ask the question, what does Paul mean. What does Paul mean here? He means three things I think primarily when he makes the statement at the end of verse 1. First of all, that God is ultimately, notice the difference between immediately and

ultimately. God is ultimately responsible for appointing all earthly rulers, either personally installing them or allowing Satan to install them for a time and for God's own purposes. In [1 Timothy 6:15](#), the Father is called "He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords." God ultimately rules over all governments and their leaders. It was true of Pharaoh. In [Romans 9:17](#), "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.'" It was true of Nebuchadnezzar as we have seen in Daniel 4, God says I raised you up and I will put you down. In Cyrus' life we see this, in [Isaiah 45:4](#), it says "for the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, [Cyrus]I have called you by your name; [Listen to this] I have given you a title of honor." And of course, it was even true of Pilate. Jesus in John 19 said, "You would have no authority unless it had been given you from above." It was true of Nero because that's the primary one about whom Paul writes here in Romans 13.

James Montgomery Boice writes, "There is no ruler anywhere, or from anytime in history who was not set in his exalted position by God." So, whether He personally installs a ruler or whether He allows Satan to do so, God is still ultimately responsible, and He takes that responsibility. But, by doing it that way, God is not responsible for the evil that wicked leaders commit. The Adolf Hitlers of the world, the Idi Amins, the dictators of our world. So, we need to understand that. Sometimes God raises up good and wise leaders as a blessing to the people, other times He allows Satan to raise up immoral, wicked, inexperienced, incompetent rulers as a punishment or judgment for the people. But ultimately God is responsible.

Secondly, I think Paul means, when he says the ones that exist have been established by God, he is reminding us of the reality that one day our Lord will take back this world entirely from Satan from its Satanic governments and rulers and will establish his own perfect earthly kingdom. God is in charge and someday He's going to take personal charge. God's given the ultimate right to rule over this world and its kingdoms to His Son. [Revelation 1:5](#) "Jesus Christ, ... the ruler of the kings of the earth." And one day He will exercise that right and He will rid this world of all of its evil rulers. Read the end of Revelation. Read Revelation 19 where the One with the name the King of kings and Lord of lords descends and destroys His enemies. Including all of those rulers who have fought against Him and against God.

Thirdly, I think this is an important implication here because God is ultimately responsible for appointing all earthly rulers, directly or indirectly, we must submit, obey, and honor all those in positions of government authority. Ultimately God is responsible, and He takes that responsibility. That means we don't have the right to refuse to submit to them. That includes evil, bad rulers. Nebuchadnezzar, they were told to submit to Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 27 and Jeremiah 29. They were told in the New Testament to submit to Nero in Romans 13 and in 1 Peter 2.

Charles Hodge writes, "We are to obey all that are in actual authority over us whether their authority be legitimate or usurped, whether they are just or unjust."

John Calvin writes, "If we have continually present to our minds and before our eyes, the fact that even the most worthless kings are appointed by the same decree by which the authority of all things is established, then those seditious thoughts will never enter our minds that a king should be treated according to his merits. And that it is unfair that we should show ourselves subject to him who on his part does not show himself the king to us." In other words, you have to get that out of your mind. It has nothing to do with the competency or the justness of the ruler.

This is the example of the righteous in the Scripture you see this. I mean think about David, David submitted to and showed respect for an evil monarch, Saul, who sought to take his life unjustly. Although, of course, he did flee from being killed. But nevertheless, he submitted to and showed respect for Saul. Daniel willingly submitted to the absolute monarchs of Babylon, including Nebuchadnezzar before his conversion, Nebuchadnezzar after his conversion. And to Belshazzar who never was converted.

Jesus submitted to and showed respect for a subjugating army and its leaders, Pilate and Herod both of them wicked and unjust men. If you doubt that just read the gospels. Paul submitted to various local and national leaders. Many of whom were evil and unjust and who treated him unjustly. So it comes down to this folks, if God is sovereign over all earthly rulers, appointing some for our blessing and allowing others for our judgment and His own purposes, then we must submit, obey, and honor all of those who are in positions of authority.

Now let's make this really personal. I want you to think for just a moment about specific leaders in our own country that you very much disagree with. And whose leadership you don't think is right. Whether that's federal, state or local, whether that's executive, legislative, or judicial. Let me just ask you pointedly this question. Do you believe that God directly or indirectly put those people in their positions either as a blessing or as a just punishment? And do you believe that they were established in their positions by God ultimately. Listen you can disagree wholeheartedly with all they stand for. You can work to see them replaced through the democratic process. But as long as they are in their positions, you and I need to be in subjection to them. Obey their laws that are not contrary to the Scripture and honor their persons because of the position they hold and because they were established in that position by God for His own purposes. You say, "How in the world can we do that?" We can do that because we know that this isn't where our citizenship is. We're waiting for the day when our King comes and establishes his perfect rule on this planet. May God help us to respond like this.

Let's pray together. Our Father thank You for what we have learned from Romans 13. Forgive us for our disrespect. Forgive us for how we have accepted and abided the mindset of the age we live in and how we think about those in leadership. Lord give us the balance, help us to rightly disagree, help us to rightly point out injustices where they belong, where they are. But Father help us at the same time not to cross the boundary, the clear statements and teaching of Your word. Father help us to live out the gospel in how we respond to government. And now as we turn our hearts to the Lord's table, Lord I pray that you would enable us to worship You through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

A Gospel Response to Government - Part 4

Tom Pennington • Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13, what Paul teaches us here in Romans 13 has always been revolutionary. It is certainly revolutionary today but what you need to understand is that it was revolutionary in the first century when Paul wrote it. I mean, start by thinking about the Jewish people who lived in Palestine. They struggle in the first century submitting to the Romans. If you doubt that you just need to read the gospel records. And again and again you see the struggle that they had submitting to the Romans. As a result of that there were constant Jewish groups who were engaging in uprisings against Rome throughout the first century and even beyond. Because they were inherently opposed to the rule of foreigners. Of course, the greatest of those uprisings came about 15 years after Paul wrote this letter to the Romans in about 70 AD. In response to that rebellion Titus marched on Jerusalem, he decimated the city, destroyed it, and crushed the rebellion. And so, this was a problem for those Jewish people who were not followers of Jesus Christ in the first century. But it was also a problem even for the few Jewish Christians in Rome to whom Paul wrote, they too struggled with submitting to the Roman government. Why was this so hard for the Jewish people, both for the unbelieving Jews as well as for those who had put their faith in their Messiah. Why is it hard? Well, because they questioned if Rome's authority over them was in fact legitimate authority. That's because of what was written in Deuteronomy. In [Deuteronomy 17:15](#) we read this, Moses wrote if you have a king, in the future when God gives you a king, "you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman." It was this text and its ramifications that really prompted the famous question that was posed to Jesus on Tuesday of the Passion Week. You remember in [Matthew 22:17](#) they approached Jesus and said, "Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" This was really a question of authority. Does the Roman occupying army really have authority over us as God's people? Or is that a violation of [Deuteronomy 17:15](#).

"Jesus perceived their malice, [Matthew goes on to say] and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him denarius, And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are Gods."

What Christ is saying there is He is affirming the rightful and legitimate authority of the Roman government over the people of Israel, that God had accomplished this and they were to submit to him. Obviously, they were not to submit to him when it came to the things that were Gods. That is, when what Rome asked of them violated what God asked and demanded of them. We'll look at that text in more detail in coming weeks. But that's what prompted the question. So, understand then that the Jewish people who didn't believe in their Messiah had a problem with Roman authority. The Jewish people who did believe in Jesus as their Messiah, they had a problem with Roman authority. But, are you ready for this, even the Gentile Roman citizens in the Roman churches had a problem with submitting to Rome's authority, for totally different reasons. One Roman author, Ciconias, writes that, under Nero taxes became exorbitantly high. The Roman historian Tacitus mentions a growing resistance to paying what were called, indirect taxes about the time that Paul wrote this letter in the mid-50s AD. Tacitus adds that at the very same time there were increasing complaints of extortionary practices by the tax collectors. This growing resistance to taxation by the Roman government culminated in a tax revolt in the year 58 AD, just a couple years after this letter was written. And it is very possible that Paul had gotten wind of that resistance that was beginning and growing in the capital of the Roman Empire. If so, that explains why he insists down in verse 7. and we will see it together, that Roman Christians pay both their direct and their indirect taxes.

Why is this issue about Christian's response to government so important? Well, remember the context, Paul has here explained to the Roman Christians his gospel, the gospel he preached. He wants them to support him as he looks to Western Europe and begins a ministry there. And he essentially says this, because you have been justified, as I have described it in their earlier chapters of this letter, if you have believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, if you have believed in that gospel you have been declared right with God, you have been changed by the Holy Spirit, then you will be characterized by a gospel response

to government. And that is the message of chapter 13:1-7. Now we've read this text before but let's read it again together. You follow along as I read Roman's 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. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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; 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. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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."

That is a gospel response to government.

Now we have noted that this paragraph begins with a universal command to submit to government. The first sentence states the theme of this entire paragraph. "Every person [*literally in Greek every soul, everyone without exception*] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." To be in subjection means to willingly submit to another, to recognize their rightful authority. It's a word that is often used in military context, of how a lower officer in rank responds to one who is higher than he or she is in rank. And so, that's the idea here. You are to remember that your rank is lower than that government official because God has made it so. Be in subjection to them.

Now beginning with the second sentence in verse 1 and running all the way down through verse 6, Paul supplements that universal command with the reasons that we are to submit to government. And we've learned two of them, let me just remind you of them.

First of all, we are to submit to government because God established the principle and structures of all human authority. Whether it's in the family or whether it's in the government, as he is teaching here. It's God who is behind that, notice the second sentence in verse 1, "For there is no authority except from God," God is the one who has established both the principles and structures of all human authority. Secondly, a second reason we noted is at end of verse 1 it said God has appointed all who currently occupy positions of authority within government. "Those which exist [*the ones being, literally in Greek*] are established by God." And "the ones being" he doesn't mean the positions he means rather the individuals as he comes back to in verse 3 talking about individual rulers, those who occupy those positions.

Now today, we add a third reason that we are to submit to government and it is this, if you refuse to submit to a government official, notice the singular, and I'll explain why I've used it that way, if you refuse to submit to a government official without biblical grounds, you are opposing God's ordinance. Let's look at it together, verse 2 "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God." Now what I want you to notice first of all, and this is true throughout this paragraph, that Paul doesn't qualify his statement depending on the form of government under which you live. There are 6 basic forms of government, there are really 3 but those 3 can have two different expressions. Let me explain what I mean. It was the Greek philosophers, Aristotle being the chief one, who tried to summarize human government. Encyclopedia Britannica cites Aristotle as teaching that government must be in the hands of one, or a few, or the many. That's it those are the only options. In the hands of one, a few, or the many. Now in addition to those 3 forms of government, government can be for the benefit of the people or it can be for the benefit of those who rule. So, you have to sort of overlay those two on to those three. And when you do here's what you get.

Government by a single person for the general good is called a **monarchy**. Government by a single person for the ruler's benefit is called **tyranny**. Government by a minority is **aristocracy** if it's aiming at the state's best interest and the people's best interest, it's called **oligarchy** if it benefits the ruling minority, it's really all about those who are in power and empowering them. Popular government, Aristotle said, that's in the common interest, he calls it **polity**, not a word we would use in that way. Interestingly enough Aristotle reserves the word **democracy** for mob rule by anarchy. Of course, he's using it differently than we use it but sadly it can sometimes degenerate into that.

The point I want you to get is this, there are those 6 basic forms of government, whether they are used for the public benefit or for the benefit of the rulers, but the form of government under which you live doesn't change the commands of Romans 13 at all, has no effect on it. Listen to **John Calvin, "Divine providence has wisely arranged that various countries should be ruled by various kinds of government.** [*Did you hear that? Divine providence has decided that different countries would have different kinds of government*] **If it had seemed good to Him to set kings over kingdoms, senates or municipal officers over free cities, it is our duty to show ourselves compliant and obedient to whomever he sets over the places where we live.**" That's really what we are learning in Romans 13. What about Israel? What kind of government did God establish among his people Israel in the Old Testament? Well, when God established the government of Israel, He created it as a monarchy but with some popularly chosen representatives who were also part of the leadership. We call them the elders of Israel, the elders of the nation. So, there was a king, there were popularly, I don't want to say elected, that's probably an overstatement, but popularly chosen representatives who were part of the leadership as well. In addition, in Old Testament Israel God added the prophet. His own representative, who spoke to the leaders of the on His behalf, confronting their sin or affirming their decisions. So, there was a balance of power.

In addition to that I would say this, when God established the government Israel under human rulers, it was never supposed to be an absolute monarchy. Its kings were to be under the law never above the law. Let me show you this. Turn back to the Book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 17. Earlier I quoted for you verse 15 of chapter 17 which says that no foreigner was to be a king it had to be a citizen of Israel. Now notice as Moses unfolds further here the rules for when kings sit on the thrones, notice what he says in verse 18, **Deuteronomy 17:18**, "Now is shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. [*that scroll, his own copy of the law*] It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life," By the way this is a powerful argument, I think, for the responsibility each one of us has to be in God's law and His word every day. A king with all the responsibilities that fell on him was responsible to be in the Scripture every day. Why? Notice verse 19, "...that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, [*and notice verse 20*] that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen. [*in other words that he not begin to think too highly of his power, he is a man under the law like everybody else that he rules.*] ...and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel." So, when God established government in Israel He did so not as an absolute monarchy like His own, but rather as a carefully regulated controlled monarchy where there was a balance of power and all of the rulers of the nations sat under the law of God and not above the law.

But when you look at the world as it is, as it was in the Old Testament era, as it was in the New Testament era, and is it is today, you discover that there are various forms of government. And as Calvin said, God has made that providential decision, He's the one, Acts 17, who has established nations, there are boundaries, we would add, the form of government under which they would exist. When you examine the Scripture, you discover that commands to submit and obey are given to believers living under all of those different government. In fact, I like what Charles Hodge writes in his commentary on Romans 13, he says "This passage is applicable to men living under every form of government. Those who are in authority are to be obeyed within their sphere no matter by how or by whom appointed. It is the powers that be, the de facto government, that is to be regarded as, for the time being, ordained of God. It was to Paul a matter of little importance whether the Roman Emperor was appointed by the senate, the army, or the people. Whether the assumption of the imperial authority by Caesar was just or unjust or whether his successors had a legitimate claim to the throne or not, magistrates are to be obeyed."

Calvin says exactly the same thing, he says "Princes do never so far abuse their power by harassing the good and innocent that they do not retain in their tyranny some kind of just government. There can be then no tyranny which does not in some respects assist in consolidating the society of men." In other words, in making the society of men more controlled, establishing order which is God's purpose in government.

So, folks here's what the point is, believers are to submit to the government, regardless of what form their government takes. And even if their government is led by pagan degenerate rulers, as was true in Rome in the first century and sadly is increasingly true in our own country.

Look at verse 2 again, let's take it apart, "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God" Therefore is "so that" or "as a consequence". In other words, the reason that he is giving here in verse 2 is the logical conclusion of what he said in verse 1. Because God established the principles and structures of human authority, because God has created nations and ordained governments and because God has appointed either directly or indirectly, as we learned last time, all who currently hold positions of authority within government, "Therefore [verse 2] whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God."

Now there is in the Greek text a major word play that's going on in verses 1 and 2. Let me point it out to you because it will help your understanding of what Paul is saying here. Paul uses 3 Greek words in these 2 verses that are all based on the same Greek root. The root word is **tassó**, translated in the English it's t – a – s – s – long o. That root form of the word occurs in verse 1, there it's translated "**established**". If you look at [Romans 13:1](#), it says those individuals who are in positions of power are established, there's our word tassó. They are put into place. The word means to bring about an order of things by putting something or someone in place.

The second occurrence of this root word is also in verse 1. There it's translated in our text "**be in subjection to**". There the word is not tassó but hupotassó, hupo means under, so "under tassó". It means to put yourself under the authority. So, God has tassó, "the authorities that exist" we are to put ourselves under, hupotassó, "the authorities that exist."

The third occurrence of this root word is in verse 2, there it's translated "resist". In Greek instead of tassó or hupotassó, it's **antitassó**, against tassó, it's opposed to putting yourself in place under the authority. It means to "oppose" or to "resist", it's the opposite of being in subjecting to. It's refusing to put yourself under the governing authorities.

Now notice he says "whoever resists authority" is how our English texts says it. But in Greek it literally says, "the one resisting the authority." What's "the authority?" Well at the end of verse 1 Paul is referring to individuals who occupy positions of authority. And here likely at the start of verse 2 he's referring rather than the entire group of individuals who are in authority, he's referring to "the" authority, to one person who occupies a position of authority in government.

So, let me put it together for you. Here's what he is saying, **if instead of being in subjection to the governing authorities, a Christian resists or opposes any specific government official without biblical grounds for doing so, he or she verse 2, "has opposed the ordinance of God."** Now the word **opposed** is formed from 2 Greek words, again, we have an-ti, as we say in English, an-të, is the Greek word means against, and histméi which means "to set", to set yourself against, that's what this word means. So, **if you refuse to submit yourself to any government official, unless you are being commanded to do something contrary to God's word, you have "set yourself against the ordinance of God."** That's what he's saying. The ordinance of God simply means what God has directed; what God has commanded.

So, let's apply it. **When you, without biblical grounds, refuse to submit to any government official, you are "setting yourself against" what God has directed and commanded. Ultimately what he is saying is it's an act of disobedience to God.** James Montgomery Boyce, who is now with the Lord, wrote this in his commentary on this passage, "It is the duty of Christians to obey those who exercise such authority and that includes all authorities, not just kings and presidents, but also policemen, judges and other governing authorities." You see by God's command he established government authority, by His command he appointed directly or indirectly that official that you are actually dealing with.

So, in refusing to submit, except in the case of the one ground that God has given us as individuals, we're commanded to do something contrary to God's word, refusing to submit in any other case you are opposing God's command. Therefore, you are opposing God Himself, that's what Paul is saying.

Now I think there is a key point here that sort of lies behind this verse. And that is, that **God has not made you and me the authority.** We have a hard time thinking like that in America because we are by nature the person who likes to have authority, who likes to be the authority. But this is not the reality, God

has not made us the authority, He has not made you or me the final arbiter of what ought to happen in Tarrant County or in the State of Texas or in the United States of America. It's interesting in his Institutes of The Christian Religion John Calvin anticipated this and he writes this, "Under this obedience to government, [*that is not disobedience, "this" obedience to government, what's commanded here*] I include the restraint which private citizens ought to bid themselves keep, that they may not deliberately intrude in public affairs or pointlessly invade the magistrates office, or undertake anything at all politically." He means outside of what is allowed by the laws of the land. We just don't think like that.

Let me add, by the way, that **the US Constitution hasn't made us the authority either**. A lot of Christians misunderstand this, they talk like we are the authority. I can't tell you how many times I've heard somebody say, "Look, they work for me, I'm their boss." That is a serious overstatement. Our Constitution allows us to choose the representatives who will make the laws, execute the laws, and adjudicate the laws, laws that we must then in turn submit to. But once they are elected, constitutionally and biblically they are our legitimate authority and we must obey their laws until they command us to do something contrary to God's law. We're not free to pick and choose, we are not the authority. I don't have the right to say, "That's not constitutional." I mean could say that, but that doesn't give me the right to disobey because I think it's not constitutional. Even our own constitution says, the Supreme Court decides whether or not it's constitutional and everybody has to get in line with that or you get arrested. Morris writes, "Submission to dually constituted authority is a divinely instituted good. Not an evil to be endured. With as good as grace as can be mustered."

Now, let's just apply this. And let me just pick a really painful topic. **Facemasks. Folks, you don't have to like them, nor do you even have to be convinced that they are necessary. But now that they have been legally required of us you have to submit to your government and wear them when they are required. And, here's the really hard part, you have to maintain a Godly attitude towards those who have required you to wear them.**

And let me add, we have to follow the directives of government officials without always assuming the absolute worst of every action of every person who's in the opposing party. I'm really going to get in trouble here but I'm going to say it anyway. **There are way too many Christians buying into every conspiracy theory on the internet.** But I'm not talking about being naive, I get it, not every person in government, many people in government aren't out for our interests. I understand that. But listen carefully, **a reasonable Christian response, is somewhere between mindlessly naive and hopelessly cynical.**

Verse 2 says, "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed [*has set himself or herself against*] the ordinance of God; [*it goes on to say*] and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." The person who refuses to submit to an individual with government authority, think about this, has opposed that persons rightful authority, the position they hold, has also opposed the government they represent, and Paul adds, and ultimately, they are opposing God. "And those who have opposed [*he says*] will receive **condemnation**." Now we know this word. We've already met it in Romans. You remember the last time we met it was in **Romans 8:1**, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What does this word mean? It means, **a sentence of guilty and the appropriate punishment that comes with it.**

So, what does he mean here, "they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." There are three ways to understand this condemnation. And if you read the commentaries you will find all three of these represented. **First** of all, there are those who say this is **God's eternal condemnation**. And here's how they would describe it. They would say the one who consistently rebels against government is not a genuine Christian and is marked by their rebellion against government in that way. And they will receive God's eternal condemnation. Is that true? Yes, that's true. I don't think that's what Paul is teaching here, and I'll show you why in a moment. But that is absolutely true. In fact I would say to you this morning, if you are here and you find it consistently impossible for you to submit to the authorities God has placed in your life, you need to examine whether or not you are really in the faith. Because a person who has come to submit to God is willing to submit to the rightful human authorities that God has put in place. So that's true I'm just not sure that is what Paul is saying here. And if you are in that position by the way, let me just plead with you to respond to the gospel. I read a great quote this week by one of the great early

expositors of the church, John Chrysostom, he said, "If you want to understand the graciousness of our God, think about the story of the publican, the tax collector, and the Pharisee who went up to the temple to pray. Jesus said here's a tax collector who has accumulated tens of thousands of sins. And when he truly humbles himself before God and cries out 'God be merciful to me the sinner', Jesus says, 'he walks away justified.'" And the same can be true for you today if you are willing to humble yourself before God like that. So, some say the condemnation here is God's eternal condemnation. I don't agree with that, I think that their point is true, I just don't think it's what Paul is teaching here.

The **second** way to understand condemnation is this is solely **the government's condemnation**. In other words, if you disobey a government official you are going to receive the government's guilty verdict and you are going to receive the punishment that the crime deserves. Is that true? Yes, that's true too. Is that what Paul is teaching here? I don't think so. And I'll show you why in a moment.

The **third** option is that when we talk about this condemnation, it is **God's temporal chastening of a believer through the government's condemnation**. Let me say that again, it's God's temporal chastening of the believer through the government's condemnation. Here's how it works. If a Christian breaks the law, he will receive the government's condemnation, he will receive a guilty verdict and a punishment that fits the crime. And the government will be an instrument in God's hand to chasten that believer for his or her sinful defiance of the authority that God Himself has established. This is what Paul goes on to teach. Look at **verse 4** "...if you do what is evil be afraid; for it [*government*] 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." In other words, be a lawbreaker and government is going to punish you. And if that's not because you are obeying God rather than man but rather you are just not obeying government then God will be in the punishment you receive, and government will be a minister of God in carrying that punishment out on you. This is what fits here. So, he says, "...those who opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

There's a **fourth** reason for submitting to government and that is that **God has assigned government the crucial role of maintaining order by punishing wrong and praising good**. God has assigned government the role of maintaining order by punishing wrong and praising good. This is the message of verse 3, look at it with me, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." Now notice the first word is "**for**", that connects back probably not to verse 2 but most commentators, and I would agree, connect it back to verse 1 and to the command. Here is yet another reason to be in subjection to the government. Now notice what he says in verse 3 "rulers" the ones who are currently ruling and are in a position of authority, are not, literally it says, are not of fear. And the idea is as translated here not a cause or source of fear. Fear of what? Fear of punishment. Rulers are not a cause of fear of punishment, for literally the Greek text says, the good work, the good work, this is used in a general sense. Like in verse 3 goes on to say, doing what is good. That's why the New American Standard translates it "good behavior". And the ESV translates it "good conduct." **Government is not a cause of fear for punishment for those who persistently do what is good.**

Now again, let me back up and make sure you understand what Paul is not saying. Paul is not saying here that government officials never go rogue from the divine plan. That they never begin to punish what is good and to reward what is evil. Of course, that happens. Nor is he saying that authorities never abuse their authority, clearly, they do. In fact, look back at Luke 3. You remember John the Baptist shows up and he is preaching about the kingdom that Jesus is going to inaugurate, the spiritual kingdom. And how to get into that kingdom. And you get in by repentance. And he is preaching a message of repentance. And he's baptizing in keeping with that. To show that demonstration of you need to, it's like, you need to become a proselyte and enter Judaism even though you are Jewish, you are so far from the kingdom. And so, he baptizes but he also calls for repentance. [Luke 3:8](#), "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance," if you're going to come to be baptized, saying that you are repentant, then bear fruits in keeping with that repentance. What does that look like? Verse 12, "And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" Jesus said to them, "Stop being involved in tax collecting." No that's not what he says, he says "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." In other words, be an honest tax collector. Just collect what you are supposed to collect, that's repentance. What is he saying? He's saying, it was easy for tax collectors to abuse their authority.

Go down to verse 14, "Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" [*What's fruit of repentance for us?*] And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, [*again the temptation to abuse your authority*] or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages." These are all temptations that come with authority.

And so, Paul is not saying in Romans 13 that people in authority aren't tempted to abuse that authority. Of course, they are. The greatest illustration of abuse of authority is how the perfectly innocent one our Lord Jesus Christ was railroaded through injustice to his own execution. So, what is Paul doing here? Charles Hodge says, "Paul is speaking of the legitimate design of government, not the abuse of power by some wicked men." In other words, he's saying this is how government is supposed to work and how it normally works but there of course, are exceptions. Paul is saying this, most governments and the officials in those governments, even bad ones, generally, mark that work generally, generally don't arrest and punish those who keep the laws of the land. Generally, they arrest and punish those who do evil not those who are law abiding citizens. And in doing so they maintain order in a society.

It's interesting, one of the reasons we are to submit to the government is for something that is built into the very nature of government. And that is to maintain order. He goes on in verse 3, "...Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;" He says, if you don't want to be afraid of being punished by authority, then keep the law. For example: if you are a responsible citizen and it comes time for taxes to be submitted and you honestly fill out your taxes and you don't take any shortcuts and you only take the deductions you are supposed to take. And you submit that tax return. You don't have to be afraid of the IRS. Or let me give another illustration, hypothetically speaking, you're driving home after church or you are driving somewhere this week and there is a speed trap. You know it's there to make sure that order is maintained because without that we've seen what happens the last few weeks, seen peoples' driving after the stay at home orders. It's reckless, all over Dallas. And so there they are, there's a speed trap and what happens when you see that police car with a speed trap? Fear. Until what? Until you look down at your speedometer. And if your speedometer says that you are near the speed limit then you breathe a sigh of relief and the fear begins to dissipate. On the other hand, if you look at your speedometer and you are going well above the speed limit that fear not only stays it grows. Because it's like uh oh I am had. This is going to be a ticket right here.

Paul's point is this, if you obey the laws, laws that don't command you to violate Scripture, you generally won't need to live in fear of the government. Not only will you enjoy freedom from fear, but you may even receive **praise**. Now this word praise doesn't mean you're going to get a reward. No, you're not going to get pulled over and said, "Here's a reward for keeping the speed limit." No, it's approval, it simply means **approval as opposed to condemnation**. It's like okay, you can keep going, I'm not going to pull you over. Or, it may just mean approval, or it's possible that Paul's referring here to a practice of the first century. Where Roman authorities would publish on inscriptions the names of those who were benefactors of society. Much like we do today, you know, you go to an art venue and people have contributed to build that art venue and their names are there as the donors. That's Roman, that what they did even in Roman times. And so, if that's what Paul is meaning here, he's not merely encouraging us to keep the law but he's encouraging us to be good citizens who contribute to the benefit of society. Paul's point is if you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, be a law-abiding citizen and do so for your own sake so that you can live without fear of the government. But if you refuse to do so, then you will bring judgment on yourself. In other words what he is saying is, **it's both right to submit to the government and it's wise, it's smart at the same time.**

Now the **fifth** reason to submit to government is this, **God established human government and rulers for our good**. Notice verse 4, "...for it is a minister of God to you for good." God had a number of incredibly beneficial purposes for establishing human government. And it is a theme that fits the July weekend perfectly, so Lord willing we'll examine this one together next Lord's day.

Let's pray together. Our Father thank You for the amazing practicality of Your word, for how it speaks into the issues of everyday life. Thank You for this reminder from the Scripture of a gospel response to government. Lord we acknowledge that the best human government is terribly flawed. That the best human authorities are sinners. And Lord there are even those who abuse their authority. But Lord we thank You for the gift that government is to us. We thank You for the way You use it. Help us to respond

like followers of Jesus Christ. Lord don't let us be swept along by the culture, don't let us be swept along by all the voices that are screaming at us today through the internet and the news media and so many other ways. Father I pray that You would help us instead, first and foremost, think like Christians. Thank You that here in this passage and in the rest of Scripture we have Your mind on how we ought to think and respond to the government You have placed over us. Lord give us the courage, that if the time comes when government demands that we do what is contrary to Your law, to Your word, that we will obey You rather than government and suffer the consequences of that. But Lord the rest of the time, most of our lives help us to embody these straightforward principles from Your word, remembering that ultimately You are the one who has accomplished all of these things. Thank You that we serve the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the One that calls Himself in Revelation 1 the ruler of the kings of the earth. And we thank You that someday He will return, and He will right all wrongs and establish His own perfect government. And He will rule in righteousness. We look forward to that day and until then make us faithful citizens of both countries, our citizenship here and our citizenship in heaven. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

A Gospel Response to Government - Part 5

Tom Pennington • Romans 13:1-7

Romans chapter 13. You probably read as I did this past Wednesday, Seattle Police dispersed the protestors from the area in Seattle originally known as the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone. More recently known as CHOP, Capitol Hill Occupation Protest. You probably also saw that the situation inside that protest zone was growing worse by the day. In fact, over the last 2 weeks before the Seattle Police moved in 5 people in that area were shot. One resident who has lived there, who is not part of the protest, but who's apartment in that area, told a news source on Wednesday that living there had, "been incredibly unstable and violent around the clock for the past 2 weeks." This same person went on to share an excerpt to the letter that his apartment managers, the company that manages the apartment where he lived, had written to the residents of that complex on Tuesday of this past week before the police moved in on Wednesday. This is what the letter to the people in that apartment complex said, "Since the occupation of the streets surrounding our building tenants have been subjected to violence, threats, vandalism, noise, lewd conduct, public defecation, daily fights, and limited access to the building." That doesn't exactly sound like a place you'd want to live. I thought it was ironic as I read that those who claim to be opposed to the abuse of authority within a very short period of time came themselves to abuse those under their authority in the absence of rightful government. In fact, as I consider it, it seems to me that CHOP was a microcosm of life without government. Seneca related that during the reign of the emperor Nerva, it was said, "It is indeed bad to live under a prince with whom nothing is permitted, but much worse under one by whom everything is allowed."

Today in Romans 13 we learn that God established human government for some very important purposes. In the mind of God when he decided to allow what really is a flawed human organization, He is the one who put it into place, and He did so with some very specific goals and purposes in mind. We're learning this from [Romans 13:1-7](#). I've entitled this paragraph A Gospel Response to Government. Now we've noted that the paragraph begins with a universal command to submit to government. Look at verse 1, "Every person [*literally every soul in the Greek text, that is, everyone without exception*] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." Then beginning with the next sentence there in the middle of verse 1 and running down through verse 6 Paul gives us a series of reasons that we should submit to government. So, he starts with the universal command and then unfolds the reasons that we should do so. We've looked at several of these, let me just remind you of the 4 we've examined together

Number one, God established the principle and structures of all human authority. Whether it's within marriage or within the home or in the church or within society as a whole. God is the one who established this principle of human authority. Verse 1 says "For there is no authority except from God" He's the one who has established both the principle and the structures of all human authority.

Secondly, we discovered that God has appointed all who currently occupy positions of authority within government. He gets very personal at the end of verse 1 in that he talks about individuals. He talks about the people who occupy positions of authority in government. Notice how verse 1 ends, "and those [*plural*] which exist [*the ones who exist in power*] are established by God." Now we talked about that of course, God does that in some cases directly. He does that in other cases by allowing Satan to put in positions of authority, those who are contrary to God and contrary to God's law. And He does so for His own purposes.

Thirdly, we learned a third reason to submit to government, is if you refuse to submit to a government official, without biblical grounds, and we learned that in the very first message. Primarily it's this, unless that government official is commanding you to disobey a clear command of God, if you refuse to submit to a government official you are opposing God's ordinance. Verse 2, "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves."

A **fourth** reason that we learned to submit to government, is that **God has assigned government the role of maintaining order by punishing evil and praising good.** That's the message of verse three. Notice what he writes there, "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."

Now today I want us to consider a **fifth** reason to submit government. The end of last week I just mentioned it, but we didn't look into it at all. And it's this, **God established government and appointed rulers for our good**. And this is the message of the first sentence of verse four. Notice what Paul writes, "for it is a minister of God to you for good." Now in the NAS you'll notice that the pronoun that's used here is "it," "it" meaning government is a minister of God. If you're here this morning with an English Standard Version, the ESV, you'll notice the pronoun in that case is "**he**", "he" is a minister of God, meaning an individual who is in authority in government. "It" is a minister of God or "he" is a minister of God, which is it? Well, either is possible linguistically, we can't make the decision based on the original language, rather it's context. If the second half of verse 3 is about our response to government as an entity or government as a whole then we should translate the beginning of verse 4 as "it", "it" is a minister of God to you for good. If the end of verse 3 as I taught you last week and I believe is what Paul is saying, is about our response to individual government officials, an individual government official, then we should translate verse 4 as "he", "he" is a minister of God to you for good. But that having been said let me say there is very little difference ultimately in meaning. Because for Paul and his Hebrew way of thinking, government is not exclusively a philosophical idea. He doesn't think of sort of a philosophy of government here. That's not what's going on. Instead for Paul and for every sort of Hebraic way of thinking government consists of rulers, verse 3, rulers. And verse 6 those rulers individually are, notice the plural, servants of God.

So, this morning as I work my way through this message, **I'm going to use the ideas of government and its rulers and officials basically interchangeable. Because I think both are implied, government as an entity as an existing organism or organization but also the individuals who sit in positions of authority and power. Paul seems to go back and forth between those two concepts in this passage.**

So, let's look at what he says. He says, "he" is a minister. The word **minister** is a familiar New Testament word. It's the word from which we get our English word, **deacon**. And, of course, it's used in the context of the church for those who serve or lead ministries of service. But, in secular Greek, this word deacon is used of **civic officials** and that's the intent here. I mean even today we talk about those who are involved in government as **civil servants**, that's the same idea. In the Septuagint, that is in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was made 100 to 200 years before Christ was the Bible of the New Testament, it's used in **Esther of court officials**. It's used in **Jeremiah 25:9 of Nebuchadnezzar**. And in [Isaiah 45:1 of King Cyrus](#). So, it has the idea, ministers here, that we sometimes will hear, particularly in a British context, will talk about **ministers of government**, government ministers. That's the idea behind the word here.

Now let me give this Greek sentence to you because I think you get some of the sense of what Paul is stressing. In Greek, the first word in verse 4 is "**of God**". That's the stress "of God," and it's there for **emphasis**. So, let me translate it for you literally from the Greek text. **Of God, a servant is he to you for good**. That's the stress. In other words, **rulers at every level of government are ministers of God**. Whether they serve Him well or poorly, whether they serve Him consciously or unconsciously, whether they serve Him in humble submission or in active rebellion, still they serve Him, just as Satan himself does.

I was struck this week with what Moses says about how the judges in Israel were to think. He tells them this in Deuteronomy 1 but is repeated in [2 Chronicles 19:6](#), listen to what Moses said to the judges who would govern God's people, "He said to the judges, 'Consider what you are doing for you do not judge for man but for the Lord who is with you when you render judgment. Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe.'" Moses said, listen understand this, when you're acting as a government official, specifically in that context, a judge, then you are to do so in the awareness that you are not acting on your behalf. And ultimately you are not even acting on behalf of the government, you are acting on behalf of God. If you're a government official of any kind here this morning, you need to understand that let that sink into your mind. It matters to God how you conduct your business that you have been assigned to do. You are His minister and you will give an account to Him for how you've carried out that ministry. Now notice what he goes on to say. He says a minister to you, that could mean to Christians only, to the Christians in the church in Rome and to us. Or it could mean to you meaning, all mankind. I think since

verse 1 says that every soul is to be subject to the government, I think it's **best to see government as not merely benefiting just us as believers but benefiting all mankind**. I think that's the emphasis here, all people. So, look again at verse 4, "for he is [*that is every individual government official*] a minister [*a deacon*] of God to you [*that is all mankind*] for good." **God's intended result for government is our good or our benefit.**

Now Paul has already established for us that government was ordained by God. But the question is why? Well, the Bible identifies several **purposes for good** that God had in mind when He established human government. And I want in the rest of our time together to unpack those. Some of them are here in Romans 13, there are a few of them that will be in other places. But, when he says for good, for our benefit in what sense? Let's look at these purposes for good that God had in mind behind human government.

First of all, government exists to express God's common grace. Look again at verse 4, "for it [*government or "he" every individual government official*] is a minister of God to you [*that is all mankind*] for good." Now when God does good to all including unbelievers, theologians call that common grace. It's anything but common, what they mean by common grace is that it is God's goodness, this would be a definition of common grace, it is **God's goodness by which He does good and provided temporal blessings both to believers but even to unrepentant unbelieving sinners**. In other words, when God does good to people who are His enemies it is an expression of His common grace, His goodness toward those who have not experienced His saving grace. **Government is part of God's common grace.** Gilchrist in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, in his article in government says this, "The state may be considered an expression of God's common grace extended to all mankind." That's exactly what Paul is saying to us here. It is God's minister to all of us, to everybody on this planet, for good. That is common grace.

Now it's important for us to get this to understand this because **let's just be honest Christians are some of the worst complainers on the planet about government**. Often that's because we want a better or even a Christian government. I hate to tell you this but that's not going to happen. It's happened a handful of times in human history. In fact, if you go back to even Israel and you go back to the government God established there, only 10 of the kings are called good and some of them with quotation marks. Most of them were terribly bad. Folks there are no perfect governments and good ones are rare. Remember Paul is writing this chapter when Nero is the emperor over the Roman empire and over the city where these people try to worship and serve. So, **Paul's point here is that even when government is bad and it usually is and even when it's rulers are not godly and they usually are not, even when we disagree with the laws and the policies that are passed and we often don't, government is still an expression of God's common grace**. But **how** exactly? How is government a blessing, how is it a minister of God to us for good? Well the rest of the purposes that we are going to consider together explain how human government, how our government is a blessing. So, let's look at the rest of the purposes together.

The second divine purpose for government is to restrain evil behavior. Notice verse 3, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." Now understand that we looked at this verse in detail last time so I'm not going to spend a lot of time here. But rulers produce **fear**, the Greek word is "phobos" from which we get our word phobia. Rulers produce fear in those tempted to do evil. How? By **punishing** those who break the law and by threatening to punish those who are considering breaking the law. When government executes justice on actual law breakers and it does so in a timely way, and I know this is going to run contrary to what you heard in government class, but listen to God over what you heard in government class. **When government executes justice on actual law breakers it serves as a deterrent.** Listen to what God says, [Deuteronomy 17:13](#), it says, the context, is when a person who has acted presumptuously is put to death, verse 13 says, "Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again." [Proverbs 21:15](#), "The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous but is terror to the workers of iniquity." Justice is a terror to the workers of iniquity. [Ecclesiastes 8:11](#), "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil." **When justice isn't done and when it isn't done in a timely way, it only encourages people to do evil.** When government is functioning properly government restrains evil. How?

Let me tell you it's not by education, although I'm all for education, **government restrains evil, according to this passage by fear by fear of punishment.**

Wayne Grudem writes, "There is much evil in the world that is irrational and can only be restrained by force because it will not be deterred by reason or education." We see this, I mean whenever there is a temporary state of anarchy, you can see what people would do given the opportunity. If there were no restraint by government if there was no fear of punishment. We've seen this unfold over the last several weeks. Not with the protest, but with the riots that accompanied some of them. Sheila and I saw this firsthand when we lived in LA. There were riots at one point and it became clear during those riots that civilization is a thin veneer over the surface of man's depravity. I watched people destroy, steal, set fire to homes, fire their guns on police, on fireman who were showing up to put out the fires and even on ambulances who were trying to take wounded people to the hospital. I watched them carry off everything that wasn't bolted down. I watched as gangs seized the opportunity to exact revenge on their rivals. Folks, that is what would exist without government. Government restrains evil by fear, fear of punishment.

Robert Haldane a great commentator in the Book of Romans writes this,

"The institution of civil government is a dispensation of mercy and its existence is so indispensable that the moment it ceases under one form it reestablishes itself in another. The world ever since the fall has been in such a state of corruption and depravity that without the powerful obstacle presented by civil government to the selfish and malignant passions of men it would be better to live among the beasts of the forest than in human society. As soon as its restraints are removed man shows himself in his real character. When there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Folks government exists by God's design to restrain evil behavior. And to do so by the fear of punishment.

Another purpose of government is to promote good behavior. Verse 3 goes on to say, "Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same." As we discovered last time, normally government treats peaceful law-abiding citizens well there are of course exceptions. Government officials can abuse their power. But as a rule, if you are a good citizen usually you don't have to worry about or be afraid of the government. In fact, sometimes officials at various levels of government publicly recognize and commend those who manifest certain virtues. Sometimes they are biblical virtues other times they're not. And this is what government was designed to do. [1 Peter 2:13](#) and [14](#), Peter says, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution." Then he says this "...as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the **praise of those who do right.**" You see most governments however evil or corrupt recognize worthy accomplishments that benefit others in the nation and that's one of the God given purposes of government.

A fourth purpose of government is to protect the safety of its citizens. I'm just going to touch on this verse and the point here because we're going to look at it in more detail next week. But government is to protect the safety of its citizens and it does so in 2 ways. **First of all, by punishing its citizens who practice evil.** Verse 4 goes on to say, "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." Government officials are deacons of God. Serving Him in what way? Avengers who bring God's wrath to bear, in a temporal sense, on the one practicing evil. Government's role in punishing those who do evil is crucial to the survival of society. John Calvin writing in *The Institutes of The Christian Religion* says this, "From experience we thoroughly agree with the statement of Solan. [*Solan by the way was an Athenian philosopher*] That all commonwealths are maintained by reward and punishment. Take these away and the whole discipline of cities collapses and is dissolved." Government exists, in part, to punish the citizens who do evil and protects the other citizens in so doing. **It also protects our safety by maintaining armed forces that guard against outside threats.** I hope to address this next time but for now just notice that it's implied in governments bearing a sword. Not only to execute justice on its own citizens but to defend its citizens as well. Under the Mosaic law an individual could use force, even deadly force in self-defense. The same is true for governments. Governments have a God given right to defend their people using force and even deadly force. But folks again let's be realistic without the US Military we would be exposed to enemy states such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. And without the military and our intelligence services we would be an even easier target for other enemies such as terrorists and terrorist

organizations. **Government exists to protect the safety of its citizens both from those within the culture who do evil and from those outside who would do harm to us as well.**

There's a **fifth purpose** behind human government. **It's to promote the general good and welfare of its people.** Again, notice verse 4, "for it is a minister of God to you for good." For your good, for the good of the people who are under government. In what way? There are a lot of ways that government promotes the general good and welfare but let me give you the two sort of obvious ones that jump off the page at me. **First of all, government does this by providing necessary public services through the taxes that we pay.** Paul is going to get to that in **verses 6 and 7.** Notice what he writes, "For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this [*everything that's in this passage*] very thing. Render to all what is due them; tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom." In other words, implied in the command to pay taxes is the implication, listen to me carefully, that much of what government spends its money on, not all, but much of what it spends its money on is part of its God given purpose. It's part of the role of government to provide public services, such as public works, sanitation, transportation, public health, economic guidelines and rules, standards of weights and measures, and so forth. **Government also promotes the general good and welfare of its people by ensuring an ordered society where its citizens can live in tranquility and peace.**

Turn to 1 Timothy 2, we'll come back to this text when we consider our responsibilities to government. But notice Paul says here we are to **pray [1 Timothy 2:1](#)** we're to pray, verse 2 "for kings and all who are in authority." Pray what? Well, verse 4 we're to pray **for their salvation.** God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And why? Verse 2, "so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." You see **it's part of governments role to produce an ordered society in which its citizens can live a tranquil and quiet life.** And in our case, we pursue godliness in that tranquility. [Jeremiah 29:7](#) you remember, Jeremiah wrote to the exiles that had been taken into Babylon and he says this to them, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, [*this is God speaking*] and pray to the Lord on its behalf; [*pray to the Lord on behalf of Babylon. Why?*] for in its welfare you will have welfare." That's the idea here. When government exercises its duty and produces an ordered society it allows its citizens to live in tranquility and peace.

There's a **sixth purpose** for human government. And that **is to protect the afflicted, needy, and oppressed.** Yes, this is part of the role of government and its officials. Turn back to **Psalm 72.** I read this Psalm several weeks ago. This Psalm is a Psalm of Solomon, there's some dispute about whether it's written by Solomon or for Solomon. But regardless, it details what the righteous king was to be like, what his reign was to be like. And of course, it was to be the goal and aspiration of every king in Israel. But it is only perfectly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect king who's coming. But notice here's the responsibility of a righteous king, **verses 1 through 4:**

Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's son. May he judge Your people with righteousness and Your afflicted with justice. Let the mountains bring peace to the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he vindicate the afflicted of the people save the children of the needy and crush the oppressor.

Go down to **verse 12:**

For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, the afflicted also, and him who has no helper. He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and the lives of the needy he will save. He will rescue their life from oppression and violence, and their blood will be precious in his sight.

Now folks, I understand being against big government. But don't let politics keep you from being honest with the Scripture. **Government, according to this passage and others, has a divinely ordained responsibility to care for the poor and the oppressed, and to protect them from the abuses of the wealthy and the powerful.** Israel's kings were often commanded to do this. [Jeremiah 22:3](#), "Thus says the Lord, "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place." [Jeremiah 22:15 & 16](#), "Do you become a king because you are competing in cedar? [*In other words, are you a king because you build great things for yourself?*] Did not your father eat and drink [*yes, he enjoyed life*] and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me? Declares the

Lord." But God didn't just demand that just of Israel's kings, He demanded it of pagan kings. You remember the confrontation in Daniel 4 when Daniel shows up to explain the vision that Nebuchadnezzar had seen about the tree getting chopped down that represented him and his rule. At the end of that listen to the little sermon that Daniel preaches to Nebuchadnezzar, this is [Daniel 4:27](#), "Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you; break away now from your sins [*listen to this*] by doing righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity." Here's a pagan king and God says listen, you need to repent of the fact that you're not concerned about the needs of the people. Now look I get it, the New Testament is clear, Paul is clear in 2 Thessalonians 3, that if an able-bodied person won't work, he shouldn't eat. But that doesn't mean at the same time there shouldn't be genuine concern for those who are truly needing. That is a responsibility that government has.

A **seventh divine purpose** for human government, is **to reveal God's government**. God determined that government would actually tell us about Himself. Have you ever thought about that? What does government tell us about God? It tells us two things. **First of all, it tells us about the fact of God's government**. When we see human government, it underscores the fact that we are under a larger government, the government of God even though it's invisible and cannot be seen. [Psalm 103:19](#), "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all." In Scripture our God is called King, Ruler, Leader, Despot, and Judge just to name a few. He has a government and He rules over the physical universe, over the intelligent universe, and over the moral universe. He rules over absolutely everything. And folks, human government, however imperfect it is, it exists as a living illustration of God's government.

Government also reveals the character of God's government. You say, "In what way would our government reveal the character of God's government." Here it is. **Everything that God demands of human government, everything that God demands of our government is a perfect reflection of His own rule**. In other words, don't look at what our nation does, look at what it's supposed to do. Look at the list I just went through and you get a picture of what God does in His rule. For example, He executes justice perfectly. He punishes evil doers. [Exodus 34:7](#) "...He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." He praises and rewards those who do well. [Ephesians 6:8](#), "knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord." He defends and protects the needy and the oppressed. [Psalm 146:7](#), "Who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free." He also promotes the good and welfare of His subjects. I love [Acts 14:17](#), where Paul says to a bunch of idolaters, "and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Today because of the fall and sin, human government is a terribly imperfect picture of the rule of God and yet it is in fact a revelation of God. It reveals the very fact that God rules. Just as you and I can't escape from the reality that we live under a government and are accountable to that government, we are more certainly under the government of God.

I mean if you want to get out from under sort of the restraints of the US Government you can pack up your family and move to Idaho or Montana and you can pretend there's no federal government. Sadly, there are people who do that. By the way this isn't a criticism of Idaho or Montana. It's the people who do this, the people who move their families there saying well I'm going to cast off the shackles of government. Listen you can do that, and you can pretend they don't exist, but they will find you. Because it's a reality they will catch up with you eventually. And the same way you can pretend that you don't live under the rule of God's law and His government, but you can't escape the reality. Maybe this is how you think. Maybe you try to hold God at arm's length and you say, "Listen I'm going to do what I want and live my own way and it's not going to affect anybody. I'm going to move spiritually to Idaho. And I'm going to pretend God doesn't exist and doesn't have any interest in my life." Well you can pretend all you want but a day of reckoning is coming when you will stand before your king and judge. Your only hope, my only hope, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's to humble yourself before your rightful king and say, "You have every right to tell me what to do in every detail of my life. You made me. You created me. You sustain my life. You've given me every good thing I have, and I have rebelled against You as an enemy." And humble yourself and seek the forgiveness that's found only because a God of justice carried

out His justice and perfection in Jesus Christ on the cross and then He raised him from the dead. That's your only hope to be reconciled to your king and if you refuse to do that, again, pack up your bags and move your spiritual heart to a spiritual Idaho. But God will find you and one day you will stand before Him. If you're in Christ take heart because a day is coming when you will live under a perfect government because it will be ruled by Jesus Christ our Lord. And He will do every one of these things we just studied together, and He'll do it perfectly.

So, what are some of the lesson from our study today? Let me just point out a couple for you briefly as we bring our time together to a close:

1. Let the Spirit of God renew your mind toward government and its leaders with what Scripture teaches. Cast off the cultural stuff you bought, wherever you got it let your mind be re-informed by what the Scriptures teach. Government is an expression of God's common grace for our good. That is true today in a fallen world with flawed systems controlled by fallen sinful ungodly people. It's still for our good. Government is a minister of God.
2. Thank God for government, for your government. Have you ever done that? We complain a lot, but have you ever said, "God thank you for government, thank You that we don't live in anarchy. Thank You for the way You use government around this planet to restrain evil."
3. Pray that our government will fulfill its purpose as well. Take a look at this list and say, God our government is so short of these purposes You had in mind, but would You work in the hearts of those in leadership? To produce a change where these things would become their passion.
4. This is also a test, take the test. Your response to the human authorities in your life is an accurate measurement of your response to God's authority. Why do I say that? Because God is the one who established the authority and He's the one who commands your response to that authority. So, the way you respond to the human authorities in your life is a perfect barometer of your response to God. So, if you're a wife, your response to your husband is a measurement of your response to God. If you're a child living in a home with parents then your response to your parents, you are to obey your parents in the Lord, your response to your parents is a measurement of your response to God. If you find yourself constantly in rebellion against your parents, listen, look in the mirror. That's not their problem, that's your problem, and it's not between you and them, it's between you and God. Because He's the one who established human authority. It's true of members to elders and as we're learning here in Romans 13, it's true of all of us in our response to government. Look at your response to government. Look at your thoughts, look at the words you speak, look at the posts you make. Look at the things you 'like' and ask yourself what does that show about your response to God's authority in your life.

May God help us to understand that government is a good gift for our benefit, even flawed, fallen, sinful government.

Let's pray together. Father thank you for these potent lessons. Lord what could be more appropriate in these days than what we are learning together from Romans 13. Forgive us O God. Forgive us for demonstrating our rebel hearts against You by the rebel hearts we demonstrate toward the human authorities You put in place. Lord may we repent, may we seek Your forgiveness and may we, by Your Spirit, have a renewed mind about our government. Lord I pray for those who may be here who are not in Christ. Lord help them see that just as surely as they can't run from our human government, they cannot run from Yours. Lord don't let them live a life of pretense, imagining that they can somehow skirt Your authority and get away with it. May they humble themselves before You and find grace in Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

A Gospel Response to Government - Part 6

Tom Pennington • Romans 13:1-7

Well, Romans 13, let's read again together what the Apostle Paul writes here under the inspiration of the Spirit about our responsibility and a proper understanding of government. You follow along Romans 13 and I'll begin reading in verse 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. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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; 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. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 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.

In the context of Paul's letter to the Romans beginning in chapter 12 and running to the end of the letter, he gives us what our response should be to the gospel that he has so clearly taught in the early chapters. And here we learn in this unique paragraph the Apostle Paul, a gospel response to government. I've noted for you that the paragraph begins with a **universal command to submit to government**. Verse 1 says every person, literally the text says every soul, everyone without exception is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. And then beginning in the middle of verse 1 and running all the way down through verse 6 Paul presents a series of **reasons for submitting to government**. I'm not going to unpack each of these, if you've missed some you can go back and catch up online. But let me just list them for you. Here are the **5 reasons we have seen so far**:

1. God established the principle and structures of all human authority.
2. God has appointed all who currently occupy positions of authority in government.
3. If you refuse to submit to a government official without biblical grounds, that is, unless Scripture is being broken. Your being command to do something Scriptures forbids. If you refuse to submit you are opposing God's ordinance.
4. God has assigned government the role of maintaining order by punishing wrong and praising good.
5. God established government and appointed rulers for our good.

Now today I have an ambitious plan and that is for us to consider the three final reasons to submit to the government. Get your minds engaged and if you are taking notes get your pencils warmed up because we are going to cover a lot of material here in the next few minutes.

The **sixth reason** that we are to submit to government is, **if you refuse to submit, again with out biblical grounds, you will justly suffer God's wrath through government**. You remember verse 3 says if you want to have no fear of authority, do what's good and you'll have praise from the same. Now in verse 4 we see the contrast to that, "...But if you do [*literally if you are doing*] what is evil, be afraid." The Greek verb implies that if you are breaking the law you should be in a constant state of fear. Fear of what? Fear of punishment. **Break the law, Paul says, and you should be afraid**. Why? "for [*because*] it [*could be it as in the government, or it could be he as in a government official either one but in the end the same idea is included here. Why should you be afraid?*]" does not bear the sword for nothing" Now the word **bear** is an interesting word. It means **to carry something habitually, constantly, or regularly**. And therefore, it sometimes is **even translated as to wear something**. And I think that's the idea here. A government official doesn't wear his sword for nothing. In 1st century, Rome those who were in government, either wore a sword themselves or it was worn by those who served them and were standing around them. And the sword symbolized the **rulers right to use force in order to punish criminals**. It includes, when you see that word sword, think of all of the possible penalties that the state can use against those who break the law. But of course, especially it's pointing to the **death penalty**, to capital punishment. In fact, this word sword occurs earlier in Romans in [Romans 8:35](#), a violent death. We can endure, we can be faithful, we can overcome even in the face of violent death by the sword.

The sword, and the reason it's used here is the sword was often used in Roman government for **execution**. In fact, if you were a Roman citizen and you were guilty of a capital offense the most likely way you would be killed was by the sword. You would be beheaded. They reserved the more gruesome penalties for those who were not Roman citizens by and large. In fact, in [Acts 12:2](#) Herod had James the brother of John put to death with a sword, beheaded. It's likely how Paul was martyred. He was a Roman citizen and tradition says that he was beheaded and in light of the fact that he was a Roman citizen it's also likely that he was beheaded.

Paul says that a government official, does not bear, or he doesn't constantly wear his sword for nothing. In other words, for no purpose. It has a purpose. What is that purpose? Government has the right to punish those who break its laws. A God given right to do so. And it is armed and authorized to use deadly force, not only within the state itself, but even by God. Because verse 4 goes on to say for "it" or "he" either one is a minister of God in using the sword. Notice for the second time in verse 4 Paul says the government officials are ministers. It's the Greek word that is often translated deacon. But it's used in secular Greek outside the church to refer to government officials. From the emperor to local bureaucrats, everyone, they are ministers. And notice the emphasis again is on ministers of God. Again, in the Greek text, the first phrase, **"is of God they are ministers."** It's to stress the fact that **they actually operate on God's behalf**. Let me just hit the pause here for a moment and speak to you if you have a role in government. Anywhere from local law enforcement to local government roles, up to the highest offices in our country. **If you serve in government, you are a minister of God to accomplish these purposes that have been unfolded here. And to God you will give an account for how you have exercised that responsibility.**

So, what is one way that government officials minister on God's behalf. Obviously, there are a number of them. We talked about some of those last week. But here specifically one way is, notice verse 4, **"as an avenger."** Now when you hear that word you have to get like Marvel comics out of your head. You've got to get any of those sort of revenge concepts out of your head. That's not involved at all. The word avenger simply means **the one who punishes**. When government punishes notice it does so, verse 4 says, **"who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."**

Now what's the right question to ask? Who's wrath? And the answer is not the government's wrath but **God's wrath**. You remember all the way back in **chapter one of Romans verse 18**. Paul begins the body of his letter with that statement that says that the wrath of God is now being revealed. He's not talking about in the future. He's not talking about when Christ returns, you know in hell. He's talking about right now. It's **now being revealed**. How is God's wrath in the 1st Century and in the 21st Century, how is it being revealed today. Well, in Romans one the answer is **by God abandoning people to their sin**. You know when people give themselves over to paganism like our culture is doing. That's Romans one. They exchange the worship of the Creator for the worship of the Things the Creator has made. What does God do? He abandons them to their sin; He gives them over to sexual sin. He gives them over to the affirmation of homosexuality. He gives the culture over to a depraved mind. Which means that you begin to call those things that God says are evil good. You don't just do them, fallen man has always done them, but you begin to say they are good, they are right, they are wholesome.

So, that's one way God shows His wrath is He abandons people to their sin. But here in Romans 13 Paul says **God is also revealing His wrath today by using government to punish the one who practices evil**. This isn't His eschatological wrath, this isn't the wrath that will be shown at the great white throne of judgment or in eternal hell, in the lake of fire. Instead this is **temporal wrath**. When government bears the sword to punish evil, even the Roman government under Nero, it's a minister of God. It's as though God Himself were executing His wrath against human sin.

Although, Scripture forbids us from exercising personal vengeance, that's chapter 12 verse 19, don't take your own revenge. Here in chapter 13 Paul reminds us that God often accomplishes His vengeance against sin through government.

So, how does government punish sin? Well, look at verse 4 again, it bears a sword. What does it use that sword for? Not to rap the knuckles of those who break the law but to execute them. As government officials bear the sword, they represent God. Now let's be clear God expects those who bear the sword, who execute His wrath against those who do evil, **He expects them to do so under the God ordained principles of justice**. How is that principle of justice enumerated in the Old Testament? It's called the

Lex talionis. You've heard that term. The Lex talionis. It's a Latin phrase that literally means **the Law of Retaliation**, but it captures a phrase that occurs three times in the Old Testament, three passages. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Now if you grew up watching old westerns like I did, that verse was usually yanked out of its context to justify personal revenge. That's not what the Lex talionis is at all. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was actually a commitment to doing justice so that **the penalty fit the crime**. That phrase occurs three times in the Old Testament law. I'm not going to have you turn there but if you want to jot it down you can look at it later. Three times: [Exodus 21:22-25](#), [Leviticus 24:17-22](#), and [Deuteronomy 19:15-21](#). And each time that phrase occurs, the point is clear. The concept of Lex talionis, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, means that **the arrest, the treatment of the accused while in custody, the sentence, and the execution of that sentence should all fit the crime**.

This was revolutionary in the ancient world. I mean if you have read anything in history you know about Hammurabi's Code for example. So, what happened if you lived under Hammurabi's Law Code? If you stole something, they cut off your hand. That didn't fit the crime. So, what does God say ought to be done? Well a thief ought to pay back what he stole and make additional penalties in restitution. There should be interest paid if you will on what he stole. And so that's how the punishment fits the crime, that's Lex talionis, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, it fits the crime.

Now **under the Mosaic law, there were primarily three means of punishing a law breaker**. Have you ever thought about this? Under God's law in the Old Testament, if someone broke the law there were one of three ways they could be punished. **One was restitution and fines**. That was frequently true. You made restitution; you paid a fine for having done it. So, you didn't just restore what you took, you had to now pay above and beyond that depending on the crime itself as to what percentage that was.

A second form of punishment that was available under the Old Testament law, was **corporal punishment**. And that is scourging or public beating. Now immediately when we hear that we're like, "How horrible." Really? You think that's a lot more horrible than locking a guy up for 5 years?

The third penalty under the Old Testament law was death by stoning, or hanging, or the sword. So, the death penalty.

Now when you hear that list of three, did you notice what was missing? **No prisons**. Now there were prisons if you look at the Old Testament. There were prisons in neighboring countries, and they were later introduced into Israel by some of its kings, but they were primarily a pagan idea. And weren't communicated in the law of God at all. **If I understand correctly it was the Quakers who introduced prisons to America in the 1700's**. They believed; the Quakers believed that locking up a criminal for a period of time could make him penitent. That's why early prisons were actually called penitentiaries. They were to make the penitent, to make them repent of their sins. But you know and I know that prisons have instead become cesspools of evil. Instead of reforming, prisons help criminals learn new ways to break the law. It encourages sins like homosexuality, involvement in gangs, in drug use.

Regardless, putting all of that aside, whether it's done well, or it's done poorly by God's plan government exists to punish those who do evil. So how does government know what's evil? You ever thought about that? Well, clearly, they often get it wrong, but they often get it right. How do they get it right? It's because, remember chapter 2 verses 14 and 15? The substance of God's law, what He requires morally of people is written on every human heart. That includes the heart of rulers. What that means is, even evil governments generally forbid murder. They generally agree that lying about contracts is wrong. They generally agree that stealing another man's property should be forbidden. And although they allow many sexual sins, most governments forbid some of the most egregious sexual sins of violence and so forth. So, in a flawed way, human laws often reflect God's moral law. And government punishes those who break those laws and in so doing they carry out, albeit imperfectly and sometimes even abusively, the temporal wrath of God against sin. **The fact that government sometimes gets it wrong and misuses or abuses its authority doesn't change the reality that it can be a beneficial reality. In fact, think of parents there are many parents that misuse and abuse their authority but that doesn't mean the concept of parenting should be done away with. It's a gift of God.**

Now before we leave this point, I need to step away and briefly address **three huge ethical implications**. There are questions that may have come to your mind even as I have walked through what I've done so far. If they haven't, they should. Alright? So, let me deal with three big issues.

Number one, does the Bible teach capital punishment? The answer to that is, yes it does. The Bible distinguishes between the sinful taking of a life and capital punishment. One is strictly forbidden the other is commanded. Now to understand this you have to go back to the Book of Genesis. Turn back to Genesis 6. In Genesis 6 we learn that one of the major reasons for God sending the flood to destroy humanity was violence. Look at [Genesis 6:11](#), "Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with [*what?*] violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has become before Me: for the earth is filled with violence because of them: and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.'" And then He goes on to give instructions for an ark. So, one of the key factors in God destroying the people on this planet with a worldwide flood, was because of the violence that had marred humanity.

Now God destroys the world except for 8 people who survived, Noah and his family. At the end of that God makes a covenant that He would never again destroy the earth with water because of man's sin. Go over to chapter 8:20 Noah builds an altar, he makes sacrifice, verse 21, "The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.'" Verse 22, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Now that verse does not mean that you and I should not be wise stewards of our planet. Clearly, we should we have a responsibility to do so. At the same time God has committed, he has sworn by Himself that the world will exist until He ends it.

So, He makes this covenant. But what's going to happen about man's violence? How is man's violence to be curbed or restrained after the flood? I mean God's law is clear that such violence is forbidden right? [Exodus 20:13](#), "You shall not murder." The sixth commandment. First of all, make sure you understand what that means. The Hebrew word translated murder there includes if you look at it and you trace it through its context in the Old Testament, you'll find that that word includes several crimes as we think of them. It includes the crimes that we define as murder, first and second-degree murder, and voluntary and involuntary manslaughter. Or as they are labeled here in Texas murder, capital murder, manslaughter, and criminally negligent homicide. The penalty for those crimes under Old Testament laws was the death penalty. The one exception was involuntary manslaughter where you could in fact, flee to a city. But something was taken from you, your liberty was taken from you, you had to flee to one of the cities of refuge and stay there until the High Priest died. Because you had taken a life, albeit accidentally, but negligently. But for the rest of these crimes it was capital punishment.

Now understand this, that **capital punishment predates the Mosaic Law by a couple thousand years. And it is required not just of Israel but of all mankind.** Look at [Genesis 9](#), the first four verses of Genesis 9 you know, describe God's blessing on Noah and giving him dominion over the world and giving him everything, every living being for food. So, we could eat meat as well as vegetation. God gave it to us for that end. Verse 4, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." Now watch verse 5, "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed, [*Why?*] For in the image of God He made man."

So here is a command to all of humanity that predates the Mosaic Law by a thousand years that says if someone unjustly takes a life you are to take that person's life. Why? Here's the irony, **to show the sanctity of human life**. If a beast kills a man, the beast is to die. If a man kills a man, that man is to die. Why? To show the sanctity of human life. That humans are made in the image of God. But to carry this out biblically the just taking of a life in exchange for the life unjustly killed, has to happen the way God has prescribed.

So, let me give you some **caveats. Capital punishment can only happen: Number one: If the accused is justly tried and guilt is established.** By due process, that is where there is a hearing over the matter untainted by partiality, prejudice or any other travesty of justice. That's **Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 17,**

and countless other places. And there has to be **sufficient evidence**. Usually **two or more witnesses** is required. There is some debate if irrefutable forensic evidence could be allowed.

Secondly, the death penalty can only happen if the death penalty fits the crime. And obviously here in Genesis 9 the only command for the death penalty addressed to all nations is the unjust taking of another life. The other capital punishment cases that are in the Mosaic Law were commanded of Israel only. However, those laws do illustrate that there are other crimes that could warrant the death penalty and may be determined by individual government. However, the point is the crime should be so horrific that death alone fits the crime. A life has to be taken because in a very real sense another life has been taken.

Thirdly for there to be the death penalty it has to be carried out under the jurisdiction of a duly appointed government authority. This is the message of **Deuteronomy 19** and of **Romans 13**, the government bears the sword. You see even the Old Testament, that avenger of blood you read about that was not somebody who just decided to carry out personal vengeance because he was a family member. That was instead someone authorized by the court that had found the person guilty and authorized that person to take the life or to bring back in custody that person. So, it had to be done under governmental authority and according to Paul, those in government who participate in the execution of justice are ministers of God. Carrying out His wrath against evil doers. So that's the first ethical issue.

There's a **second ethical implication in this text that we need to consider and that is, does the Bible teach the idea of a just war.** Does government have the right to engage in war with other nations or another way to ask it is, is there such a thing as a just war. And the Biblically I believe is **yes** and let me tell you why. Let me give you some biblical arguments for a just war.

Now I'm not going to give you the standard philosophical arguments that you can find out on the internet, you can go search those if you want. Some of them are helpful, some of them are debatable and run contrary to even what is taught in Scripture. Rather what I want to examine are some biblical arguments. These aren't all the biblical arguments, just a representative sample.

Number one, war is not inherently evil. Why would I say that? Because God wages war with Satan and at times with other humans. In [Revelation 12:7](#) there was a war in heaven between the holy angels and Satan and his demons. God describes Himself as a warrior, [Isaiah 43:13](#), "The Lord will go fourth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies." And of course, I think the most powerful example is [Revelation 19:11](#) where you have Jesus returning. John says, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war."

In addition to that God commanded Old Testament Israel to go to war with other nations. [Joshua 8:1](#), "...Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai" God says. In [Numbers 21:14](#), you have a reference to the Book of the Wars of the Lord. That is, the wars that the Lord had commanded and authorized. So, war is not inherently evil.

Secondly, war is part of the God ordained role of government. That's what we are seeing in [Romans 13:4](#), government bears the sword. As we saw last time, it bears the sword to protect its citizens in two ways. By punishing its own citizens who practice evil and by maintaining armed forces that guard against outside threats. That is implied in the statement that government bears the sword. Paul is teaching that government has the right to use force for the protection of its citizens. It is logical that if that includes enemies within it also includes enemies without.

A third argument I would give would be this, war is a legitimate application at a national level of the law of self-defense. In Exodus 22, if you want you can turn there but you don't have to. In Exodus 22 you have the law of self-defense. [Exodus 22:2](#) "If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account." So, if you're sleeping in your house at night and a thief breaks in a struggle ensues and you kill that person in that struggle God says you are not guilty of a crime. Now don't misunderstand alright, because he goes on to say in verse 3, "But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account." In other words, if you can see who it is, and you know you are not immediately in danger then you shouldn't take his life. And you will be guilty of taking a life if you do so even if he's in your own home. You need to call for help and do whatever you can to protect yourself. Short of killing.

This runs contrary to Texas we're here in Texas and you know over at Babe's Chicken Dinner House they have a pistol on the wall and underneath it says, "And we ain't callin' 911." I know that's kind of the Texas mindset or you know there's a little place up North White Chapel, a ranch up there that says, "Trespassers will be shot" and then underneath it in smaller text there's a line that says "And survivors will be shot again." That may be the Texas way but that's not God's way. Yes, you can defend yourself even to the point of taking a life, but you should pray that never has to happen and you should do everything you can to keep that from happening. But if it does have to happen then you are not guilty before God.

So, that's the law of self-defense. Jesus, here's an interesting one, **Jesus accepted and authorized his disciples carrying swords for their self-defense.** [Luke 22:36](#) and [38](#), again you can turn there if you want. [Luke 22:36](#) and [38](#), Jesus says I sent you out before and I told you not to take anything with you people are going to provide for you. But now I'm sending you out again and this time it's different. I want you to make preparation. So, he says "But now whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one." And then the disciples say, "They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' And He said to them, 'It is enough.'" Now some take that and say you know Jesus when he said it's enough, He's saying enough of that kind of talk, that's not what I mean. I don't think so. Because in context the money belt and the bag are real things that they are to take with them. There's no reason to believe the sword isn't. And they are obviously carrying a couple of swords already. Why? In self-defense, if you travel in the ancient world you ran a very real risk of being attacked by bandits, by thieves and you needed to protect both yourself and your possessions, your family. And so, Jesus authorized that. And if that is true for individuals, follow the logic, **if that's true for individuals, the same holds true for governments. They are authorized to use force to defend their people against both threats within and threats without.**

So, **what are the just causes then for a just war.** What constitutes a just war as opposed to one that is evil. Well, first of all, you need to know that God doesn't condone all warfare. In fact, **Scripture condemns wars of aggression.** If I had time, I would take you to **Amos 1, Habakkuk 2**, places where countries are denounced for their violent aggressive wars. [Psalm 68:30](#), "...He has scattered the peoples who delight in war." [Habakkuk 2:8](#) and [12](#), "Because you have looted many nations, all the remainder of the peoples will loot you – because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, to the town and all its inhabitants. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with violence!" God doesn't approve of wars of aggression.

So, what does God approve of? What are the valid causes for government to engage in war? Scripture allows God's people to **engage in war for three reasons.** There may be more, these are the main three. **Number one, you are allowed to engage in war to obey God's explicit command to go to war.** God gave that to His people in the Old Testament. [Numbers 31:7](#), "So they made war against Midian, just as the Lord had commanded Moses." Now folks that is not happening today. God is not personally authorizing any wars so that one comes off the table. That's not a valid reason. I just wanted to throw it up there because it was when God was leading His people.

Secondly, to defend their own land and people. This is a just war. God authorizes this for His people Israel in [Deuteronomy 28:7](#) God says, "The Lord shall cause your enemies who rise up against you." You see it's a war of aggression against the people. He will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you. In other words, you are going to defend yourself, you are going to fight back. And God is going to fight on your behalf. He says to Israel, "they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways." In so doing God authorizes self-defense for a people, for a land.

Thirdly, I would say that God authorizes war to defend other innocence against evil. The example there is in Genesis 14. You remember when Abram, he sees that Lot and his relatives have been taken captive and he fields an army and he goes and captures them, returns them back to their land.

Now that may not be an all-inclusive list, but those are the main concepts that constitute, I think, biblically a just war.

The point is that government legitimately bears the sword in part to protect its citizens even from outside threats.

A **third ethical question** we need to deal with and I'm running out of time so let me do it very quickly.

Does the Bible teach Christian passivism? Passivism has to do with the morality of violence of any kind

but often it has to do with Christians joining the military, participating in a war in any way and especially taking another life in war. Does the Bible teach that those things are forbidden for Christians? I think the answer is **no**. Let me give you several biblical arguments against Christian passivism, particularly pertaining to war. Again, I don't have time to develop them, I'll just give them to you, you can just jot them down or you can see the slides online later.

First of all, the commands that passivists typically cite, commands like, loving your neighbor, like turning the other cheek. They are not given to nations but to other individuals. And even with individuals they are forbidding revenge not self-defense. We already saw self-defense is allowed by God.

Secondly, the Hebrew word that is translated murder in the sixth commandment is used 49 times in the Old Testament but never of taking a life in war. That's a different word altogether.

Thirdly, God blessed and empowered individuals who participated in just wars. Read the blessing by Melchizedek on Abraham after he returns from warfare in Genesis 14. Or David, David says in [Psalm 18:30](#). "As for God, His way is blameless" and four verses later he says, "He trains my hands for battle, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze."

Fourthly, I would say soldiers who became followers of Christ were not told to leave their occupations. In fact, in [Luke 3:14](#) you remember soldiers want to repent the Baptism of John the Baptist and it says some soldiers were questioning him saying, "What about us? How do we manifest the fruit of repentance?" Verse 13 "And he said to them, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.'" He doesn't say, you need to throw your weapons away and you need to withdraw completely from military service. He says, you need to be better soldiers. And of course, you have the example of Cornelius in Acts 10, no indication in becoming a follower of Christ he ever left his role of a centurion. There are other examples as well.

So, to summarize, it is legitimate for Christians to be in the military, to participate in just wars, and even to take the life of an enemy.

Now folks I understand that all three of those ethical questions deserve their own sermon or perhaps series, but for today's purposes I'm going to leave it without overview.

So, the sixth reason, back to our study of Romans. The sixth reason to submit is if you refuse to submit you will justly suffer God's wrath through government.

A **seventh reason to submit to government**, and I'm just going to touch on these because they're simple and easy to understand. **You should obey government because it's right and reflects God's great plan for humanity.**

Look at verse 5, "Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake." Therefore, because of everything you have learned about the role of government in the previous verses, it's necessary to be in subjection. In part because of fear verses 3 and 4, fear of punishment. But not only because of wrath. As Christians there's a higher motivation. Notice what he says, "**...also for conscience' sake.**" That word conscience here isn't the idea of your own sort of subjective understanding. Here it means **the knowledge that you gained**. When you understand how government fits in to God's structure of society, as we have learned in this passage, you will want to submit for conscience' sake because you understand God's purpose and the role of government in that plan. The way Peter puts it in [1 Peter 2:13](#), "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution."

There's **one final reason for submitting to government**. And that's **the authorities are God's servants, devoted to fulfilling His purposes in society**. Notice verse 6, "For because of this" again that probably refers back to everything we've learned so far in this paragraph. When you understand that government is a divine institution because of this you also **are paying taxes**. What he's saying is listen, you already pay your taxes and in paying your taxes there is an implicit acknowledgement that government has a rightful authority over you. And he goes on to say, "**...for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.**" For the third time in three verses Paul refers to those in positions of authority and government as **ministers** of God. The first two times he uses the word from which we use the word deacon. This word is a **different word**. This word is used widely in secular Greek of **public servants** of various kinds. But here Paul says they're not just public servants they're servants of God. And they are

notice," ...devoting themselves to this very thing." That's not just for collecting taxes. They're devoting themselves to all of these responsibilities that I've enumerated in the first five verses of this chapter. You see, we understand that rulers are ministers of God, fulfilling His purposes in society. And we are willing to contribute in taxes whatever is required that will allow them to fulfill their roles. Because we understand that larger picture and because of that we should subject ourselves to government.

So, there you go. Paul has given us plenty of reasons to submit to government. Did you notice that many of those reasons have to do with the blessing and benefit that government is to us?

So, I have just **one sobering question** that each of us should ask ourselves. I'd like for you to ask yourself this question. In light of what we've learned from [Romans 13:1-6](#) and all of the benefits and all of the blessings that God uses government to accomplish. **Is that how you think about our government and our government officials?** Be honest the Lord knows your heart. Is that how you think about our government and our government officials? However much you may disagree, however much you may doubt the wisdom of some. Is this the mindset you have? If it's not then let me just remind you, in fact, just look back again at [Romans 12:2](#), Paul says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Let me just tell you. What that verse taught us is that your mind, listen carefully, **your mind belongs to Jesus Christ. That means you don't have a right to have your own opinions about anything. Your opinions about everything that's in this book should be the same as Christ's opinions. And so, one of two things is happening. Either you have bought your own ideas or more likely, you bought into the influence of the culture around you and it's conformed you, it's shaped you, it's pushed you into it's mold, it's way of thinking. Or you're letting this book and specifically the passages we just studies, shape your thinking about government. Those are the only two options. We need to ask ourselves do we really understand that our mind, including our thinking about government, belongs to Jesus Christ.**

Let's pray together. Father thank You for these great truths. Forgive us for being swept along, for being shaped and molded by our own thoughts and even more frequently by the culture we live in. Lord help us to extricate ourselves from that and by Your grace let Your word, let what You have taught us in this passage, reshape our thinking. Renew our minds so that we reflect Your perfect will that's revealed here in the pages of Your word. Lord may our response to government be a gospel response to government. And not that of all of the unbelieving culture around us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

A Gospel Response to Government - Part 7

Tom Pennington • Romans 13:1-7

This morning we return to Romans 13 and we're going to finish up our study of the paragraph that deals with our response as believers to our government. For two thousand years, the church of Jesus Christ has struggled to define the relationship of church and state. In fact, there has often been and even continues today a great deal of confusion about how the church and state should interrelate.

Now let me just give you a brief history so you understand this. Of course, the first three hundred years of the church's existence it was fairly simple. The church was persecuted by the governments both local and the Roman Empire. And what you need to know about the relationship between the church and state you find in the pages of the New Testament, you find in the paragraph we're studying here in Romans 13. But it all became much more complicated in the year 312 AD when you have the conversion of Constantine. Almost immediately the church and state began to be intertwined as if they were interdependent entities. It was a flawed view of the relationship between church and state. And that flawed view continued long beyond the fall of Rome. In fact, when you look at the thousand years from the fall of Rome to the Reformation, the Middle Ages, that entire period was marked by this flawed view carried on by the marriage of the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. It thrived for a thousand years in that environment. We are profoundly grateful for the Reformation. We are profoundly grateful for the reformers and their recovery of so many of the truths, the rich truths of the gospel, that had been lost during those dark years.

Sadly, and this is something we have to admit, that while the reformers brought much reform with them, needed reform, in the key gospel doctrines, they also brought along with them some of the remnants of Roman Catholic theology that had marked the church through that period of time. These were not perfect men. Whether you want to talk about Martin Luther's anti-Semitism or whether you want to talk about Calvin and what happened to the heretic under the government of Geneva. They were men who we respect and appreciate for their work's sake, but they were not perfect men. They were flawed men. And one of those flaws was to bring with them into the Reformation some baggage that they inherited from the Roman Catholic Church and the Middle Ages. One of those things was the **relationship between church and state**. You cannot find the view of the reformers on this issue in the New Testament. In fact, it's interesting when you read the Westminster Confession of Faith and they present this sort of intertwined view of church and state. When they seek to find proof text to make the point, they don't go to the New Testament because there are no texts in the New Testament that would make that argument. They would have to go back to Old Testament Israel and what happened in the nation that God chose. And they try to say that is the standard and model for what all of government and relationship between church and state should be.

The reformers with this flawed view in turn influenced the theology of the Puritans, including their view of church and state. We appreciate and love the Puritans just as we do the reformers. Ironically though the **Puritans** fled Europe to escape the oppression of a state religion that had been born out of this flawed view of the intermarriage of church and state. But they ended up importing that very same flawed view into their rule of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They inflicted the same religious oppression that they had experienced in Europe and fled on those under their leadership in New England. And it all goes back to this **long misunderstanding of the relationship between church and state**.

So how did things begin to correct biblically? Well the foundation of the idea of separation of church and state that is written into our founding documents, can be traced to the ministry of a man whose name you need to know. His name is **Roger Williams**. He was born in England in the year 1603. He was a Puritan pastor and theologian. He ended up founding what became the Colony of Rhode Island. He was a man way ahead of his time. Roger Williams **believed that the Native Americans should be treated fairly**. In fact, he insisted that it was wrong to take their land without purchasing it and so the land that became Rhode Island was actually purchased from the Native Americans who had previously been there. He had a great relationship with them, they respected him throughout his life. He also was **one of the first abolitionists**. He advocated religious freedom and the separation of church and state. He called it **Liberty of Conscience**. Obviously, he was a committed follower of Jesus Christ, committed to the truths of Scripture but he didn't believe that church and state should be intermarried. So, it became the state's role

to insist on the Christianizing of the people. **He's the one who most clearly articulated the concept of the separation of church and state. Now don't misunderstand not the entire separation of the Church from anything related to the state as is currently held. But rather a balanced separation of two God ordained entities carrying out two different missions. The state, Williams taught, was never to punish those who violated the first four commandments in the Ten Commandments. Rather the state's job, even as we've learned in Romans 13, was to punish those who violated the second table. That is, the commands that had to do with our duty to other people.**

Now this separation of church and state that Roger Williams taught and became sort of inbred into the foundation of our own country, it is what the New Testament teaches. In fact, we can say that **church and government are distinct in several key ways.** Let me just give you this little list. When you think of the relationship of church and state, they are distinct in several ways.

First of all, they have different origins. If you want to find the origin of the state of government, you go back to Genesis 10 and Genesis 11. That's where it begins. On the other hand, if you want to find the origin of the church you go to Acts 2 with obviously thousands of years between them.

They have different realms over which they rule. You remember Christ before Pilate in [John 18:36](#), said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this realm." My kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. He was making the distinction that government, the state, represented by Pilate, and the church, His realm in terms of the spiritual kingdom He was establishing were two different realms.

Thirdly, they have different leaders. In 1 Timothy 2 we are told to pray for the authorities over us in government. And then you come to the leaders in the church in 1 Timothy 3 chapter 5 and so forth.

There are different standards for the leaders of these two entities, these two organizations. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 you have the standards laid down for those who would lead the church. They are not laid down for those who would lead the state.

You have different missions for the state and the church. You want to know what the mission of the state is? Study, as we have been doing, [Romans 13:1-7](#). But if you want to understand the mission of the church then read Ephesians 4 beginning in verse 11 and running down to verse 16. You have spelled out how the church is to function, Christ planned for the church. They have distinct missions. There's a lot of confusion on this today, and I would say this by the way, if you are unclear in your own mind of what role the church should play in state, in politics, and vice versa, there's a great book you need to read. It's called *What is the Mission of the Church?* by **Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert**. Which they very carefully and biblically articulate the mission of the church versus missions that are often hoisted upon the church.

Here's how Carson spells it out in the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia in the article on government, I really like this, listen carefully, "Many contend that the church has a political role and should be ready to exercise its powers in a lobby aimed at influencing government policy. The New Testament reply to this would surely be to stress the respective roles of the church and state. The task of the church as church is to preach the gospel, edify the believers and lead men to worship the living God. Individual Christians may enter the political field, but they do so primarily as citizens not as representatives of the church." And of course, he goes on to say, "That as Christians they imprint just with their characters the leadership that they bring in government." He goes on to say this though, "The church as a body, aims not primarily at improving the social order, but her main objective is the salvation of men. When the church forsakes her primary task, of preaching the gospel, to engage in political enterprises her true mission is lost." By design God has given the state a mission and He's given the church a mission. It doesn't mean we shouldn't seek His individual believers to impact the culture in the state in which we live. It means that it is not the mission of the church to do so.

They also have different futures. In [Daniel 2:44](#), as Daniel got a revelation of how all the kingdoms of this world would unfurl and how they would develop and ultimately be destroyed we read this, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people [*listen to this that kingdom, the geopolitical future kingdom of Jesus Christ on this planet will*]...put an end to all these kingdoms [*that is the kingdoms of men*] but it will itself will endure forever." So, they have different futures. The kingdoms of men as we know them on this planet will be destroyed someday, but the kingdom of our Lord will continue forever.

Jesus makes this distinction clear, I think, between church and state on two separate occasions. One of them is in [Mark 12:17](#) when He was asked about paying taxes. Remember He said, "Render to Caesar the things that Caesar's." That's his realm, give him what belongs to his realm, but to God the things that are God's, that's His realm. In [John 18:36](#), Jesus was before Pilate, I mentioned it a moment ago, this is what He said, "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.'" We have two different realms, the church and the state.

Now the Book of Romans then almost entirely addresses life in the spiritual kingdom over which Jesus reigns, life in the church. But Romans 13 in the middle of this instruction about the spiritual kingdom we live in, **Romans 13 teaches us who belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom, how we should relate to the kingdoms of this world. how we should relate to nation states, to our own government.**

[Romans 13:1-7](#) then is a gospel response to government. Here is our right relationship as the church to the state. It begins with a universal command to submit to the government, verse 1 "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." Then that immediately is followed by a list of reasons why we should submit, and we've looked at those. Beginning verse 1 and running down through verse 6.

Today I want us to consider just the final verse of this paragraph, verse 7. And in that verse, we discover the duties of submission to government. Look at verse 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."

Now you'll notice the first part of **verse 7 begins with a summary of our duty to government in light of our submission.** He says, "**Render to all what is due them.**" Those words are filled with **images of debt and obligation.** What he's about to command us here is not voluntary, it's not a social contract, it's a debt. In fact, look at how he says it. The word "**render**" literally means **to meet a contractual or other obligation, to pay someone or even to pay something back to someone is the idea of "render."** This word is used in making vows to God and paying them back to Him. It's used of an employer's obligation to pay wages to his employee. In the papyri those documents that were written on the papyrus reed made paper and thrown in the ancient trash dumps, and the archeologists dig them out and we can kind of see common ordinary documents and how words were used. I spent a semester in seminary translating papyri. And in the papyri this verb translated render here is often used in financial documents and it's translated, or it's used in this way, "I will repay" and then it's followed by the amount. I will repay, that's what he is saying. **Repay, pay back.** It's the same verb that Jesus used in [Mark 12:17](#), "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

In fact, I think here in verse 7 and most commentators agree, Paul is explicitly borrowing from our Lord's statement in the gospels. Render, pay back, and then he adds to all, that is all of those who are in positions of government. In verses 8 to 10, which we'll get to Lord willing, next week he deals with the debt we owe everyone, the debt of love. But here he's talking about the debt that we owe to those who are in authority. Pay back, to all of those who are in authority what is due. Literally the word means your debts. **Pay back your debts to those in authority. It starts out as a word that is financial but eventually it begins to refer to what we owe morally or ethically. That which we ought to do. What is our duty is the idea. Pay back what you owe.**

So, this summary application then says this. All of you, it's using the plural talking to all the believers in Rome, all of you pay to all of those in government the debts or the duties that you owe them. It's implied that these are owed to them because of both the services they've rendered to us, the services that government gives us, we owe them debts for those services. But also, ultimately this debt is to God. Because He's commanded it.

Now Paul goes on to say that **we owe our government several very specific duties.** Let's look at them together. That's the summary, pay them your debts. What are our debts? What are our duties?

Number one pay our taxes. Verse 7 says, "Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom." We start out in a very painful place here, taxes. Some of us have just completed that process.

Now Paul divides our taxes here into two categories. Categories that existed in first century Rome and that still exist today. **First of all, there are direct, or fixed taxes.** That's the word translated tax, tax to

whom tax is due. He refers to those taxes that are direct or fixed primarily on people or property. So, the tax per head, like our income tax, and property taxes.

The **second expression he uses has to do with indirect taxes or what we call use taxes.** That is taxes you pay for the things you use or buy. Verse 7 says, "custom to whom custom." The Latin word for this was "portoria" which you can hear the word "port" in there. When you showed up at a port you owed certain duties, certain customs. That's the idea behind this word, it refers to all taxes on goods and services. It includes toll taxes, customs, duties, sales tax, and all the fees for various services and licenses that government charges.

So, these two words together, tax and custom, are all inclusive of the things government expects from us for us to pay, whether it's income tax, whether it's a toll tax, whether it's customs when we enter the country with goods. Or whether it's sales tax and so forth, vehicle registration fees. All of those sorts of things are included.

So, taken together then these two commands to pay our taxes, have a couple of important **implications.** I don't need to belabor it, it's pretty clear, pay your taxes. But there are some implications I just want to draw out for you.

First of all, brothers and sisters, take every legitimate deduction and tax advantage that the law allows. You are not commanded to pay the government more than you owe. But don't cheat on your taxes and pay both your direct and indirect taxes. That's what he's saying.

Secondly, don't refuse to pay your taxes as if they were voluntary. As if you are the authority and as if you get to decide well, that's excessive. Or as if you get to decide well, I don't think they are using them for legitimate purposes. Really? You think Nero was using all of the tax dollars they collected for legitimate purposes? Government never uses every dollar it collects for legitimate purposes. Never has, never will. Welcome to the real world. Paul says, that's not your job. Pay your taxes.

A third thing that I would add an implication here, and this is hardest of all I think, hopefully most of us in this room pay our taxes. But this one's the hardest, **guard your attitude about taxes.** I like the way James Montgomery Boice puts it he says, "Resignation is not the right attitude." Ouch. Been there done that. **"Resignation is not the right attitude, rather when we pay our federal taxes, we should be thankful for the armed forces those taxes support. And for the peace and national security we enjoy because of them. Taxes support the courts and numerous federal agencies from which we benefit. We have national parks, federal drug enforcement agencies, food inspectors, the CDC, the FBI, air traffic controllers, other indispensable services. [he goes on] City taxes fund schools, garbage collection, fire fighters and police. [and then I love this, listen to how he ends] without taxes government could not function, civilization would not be possible, and our lives and property would be in jeopardy every moment of every day."** So, we need to guard our attitudes, not only do we need to pay our taxes and fees, but we need to understand it is a debt we owe for services that we truly are rendered.

There's a **second duty** here that we owe government. It's to **obey the law.** Or to spell that out a little more fully, **we are to obey its edicts that is its executive orders.** We are to obey its laws, that is those laws that are passed by the official legislature and its verdicts, that is the legal decision of its courts. Obey the law. I think that's included in the expression verse 7, **"fear to whom fear" is due.**

Now let me just take that apart for you because there **are three possibilities** of what Paul means here when he says, render fear to whom fear is due. Let me give you each of them just so you know what the landscape is. Some say this means you should **fear God**, Paul is saying fear God. And they argue like this, they say, well, this could be just like [1 Peter 2:17](#). where it says, 'Fear God, honor the king.' So maybe Paul is saying fear God, honor the king here at the end of verse 7. Also they point out that [Romans 13:3](#) uses this word fear and says there's no need to fear authority if you keep the law. So, this must be fear of someone else, this must be fear of God. Also, they would argue, that in [Luke 12:4](#) and [5](#), Luke uses this word and says we should not fear men, but we should fear God. And a final argument that's used of this view is there were a couple of the early church fathers Origen and Tertullian who held this view. It's certainly possible, okay, I'll admit that to you. But I think it's highly unlikely, let me tell you why. Because the other commands in verse 7 have to do with what? Our response to government. If Paul meant that we were to fear God then we would expect him to do exactly what Peter does in [1 Peter 2:17](#) and that

is, insert the name of God. Fear God. In order to show he's interrupting the flow of his thought and he's no longer talking about government now he's talking about God. But he doesn't do that. So, there's no reason to make this refer to God. I think that one's unlikely.

There's a **second option**. Some people say, when it says "fear to whom fear" it means you are to **respect those in authority**. I think this is more likely. The arguments for this, it clearly fits the context of what's going on here. It fits the use of the word that's translated fear because it is used for respect for those in authority. In secular Greek it's used that way. And it's even used in the New Testament of respect for other human authorities. In [Ephesians 6:5](#) of employees for employers. [1 Peter 3:2](#), of wives for husbands. So, this may be what Paul means. But if he does then it seems to me these last two expressions are redundant because you have respect and respect essentially, back to back. Some would say well there's a nuance of difference, one is greater than the other. But the usage in the New Testament doesn't support that.

So, after studying this passage, I've landed on the **third option** which I would encourage you to consider, that it means to **obey government officials**. Now why would I come to that conclusion? The only way the word fear is used here in this context is fearing the government enough that you obey its laws. You go back to verses 3 and 4, that's what he says, you don't want to have any fear, then obey. Verse 4 if you don't obey the government then you need to really fear. But verse 5 to me is the clincher, because there Paul says you need to be in subjection to government, you need to be in subjection for conscience sake, but you also need to be in subjection because of wrath. What does that mean? Because of the fear of being punished for breaking the law.

This is very much what Paul says in [Titus 3:1](#), where he says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient" that's what he's saying here as well I believe. And by the way I'm in good company, John Calvin takes this view as well. But I think that's what he's intending to say here. If so, the point of this command when he says, fear to whom fear, is that we are to **fear the government enough that we obey the executive orders that are issued, we obey the laws that are passed by the legislature, and we obey the legal verdicts of our government and its officials, unless they require us to directly disobey the Scripture**.

There's a **third duty we owe government**, not only to pay our taxes and obey the law, but it's to **honor its officials and its rulers**. Verse 7 you'll notice ends with these words, "**honor to whom honor**." Honor means to show **reverence or respect**. It's the same word that's used in Ephesians 6 to describe how children are to respond to parents in the fifth commandment, honor your parents, same word. We are to show honor or respect to those in government, not because they are important or wealthy, or powerful, but because God has made them His ministers. Calvin writes, "We are to obey kings and governors whoever they may be, not because we are constrained, but because it is a service acceptable to God." There's the point we were just making, and then he adds, "For He will have them not only to be feared, [*that's obedience*] but also honored by voluntary respect."

Now here's a question for you. How do you honor government officials? What does that mean? Well posted on our fridge at home, there's a little card from when our kids were young, that says here's what it means to honor, show respect, for your parents. And it has three points. Essentially the points I want to make with you now because whenever you are honoring an authority these things are true. This word respect or honor includes these. Three primary ways to show honor and respect to those in authority:

1. **Attitude**. How do you think about them? In [1 Samuel 24:6](#) and [10](#), David you remember refused to raise his hand against Saul, as bad as a king as Saul was, because he said he is the Lord's anointed. I'm not saying that our government are the Lord's anointed the same way that those leading Israel were. I'm simply saying there was a way of thinking about those in authority. The respect that was included. Here in Romans 13, three times in verse 4 and verse 6, three times we are told to think of them as ministers of God. That's respect. In [1 Peter 2:17](#) it says, "honor the king" the same word. In context it has to do with you attitude. How you think about them. How do you think about the government officials in our country? That's where it starts. Respect and honor starts between your ears.
2. You show respect and honor in the **words you use**. How you speak about them and to them. [Exodus 22:28](#) says, "You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people." Be careful how you speak about those who are in authority. Paul cites that very verse in Acts 23 when he stands before the

Sanhedrin you remember, and he was unlawfully struck by someone standing there. And he says, God will strike you too you whitewashed wall. This is hypocritical, you are treating me illegally. And someone says, be careful how you speak to the high priest who had ordered it and Paul responded quoting this verse he says in [Acts 23:5](#), "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

3. You also show honor and respect by **physical gestures**. That is cultural gestures that show appropriate respect for authority. These are different depending on the culture and the circumstance. But there are in every culture ways that you indicate your respect. For example in [Leviticus 19:32](#) talking about those who are younger showing respect for those who are older it says, "You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord." When I was growing up, I was taught if I'm sitting in a chair and an older person comes over and starts talking to me, I get up. Out of respect for them and their position of age and experience over me. There are in culture ways that we express our respect for those who are in government and we need to use those. In 1 Chronicles 21, you remember David shows up at the threshing floor of Ornan to purchase it and Ornan falls on the ground, he prostrated himself before David with his face to the ground. In that culture that's how respect was shown. It's not how respect is shown in our culture but there are ways we are supposed to express it. And we're not supposed to bypass those because we think the person is despicable.

So those are the three duties we owe government that are outlined in Romans 13. We have a responsibility to pay our taxes, to obey the law, and to honor our leaders.

But there's a **fourth duty** we need to add that's **not here in Romans 13**, it's **pray for our nation and its leaders**. There are two passages, I won't have you turn there because of time but let me just mention them to you. First of all, you need to thank God for our rulers, and you need to pray for their salvation. [1 Timothy 2:1](#) and [2](#) says, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, [*and then he gets specific*] for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."

So, this is a painful topic, but let me just ask you when's the last time you **thanked God for those who are in various positions of government** in spite of their foibles, their flaws, their weaknesses, their sins. And when is the last time you prayed honestly for their salvation.

Secondly, we are to **pray for the prosperity of the nation**. In [Jeremiah 29:7](#) you remember God had sent His people off into Babylonian captivity and through Jeremiah He says this to them, "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." In other words, we ought to care about the wellbeing of our nation, the flourishing of our nation, I'm not talking about just economically, I mean in every sense, for the sake of God's people who live here.

So that's how we are to respond to government. The question is **why**? Why should you respond to government like this? Listen to [1 Peter 2:13](#), "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right." **For the Lord's sake. And then he adds, and to "silence the ignorance of foolish men." In other words, to make sure your testimony is untarnished for the gospel because of how you respond to government.**

So, let me ask you this, is your response to government like that? Is it noble, gracious, winsome, attractive, does it make the gospel that you proclaim appear attractive? Or does it detract from the gospel you are trying to share. That's the challenge Paul gives us. This is a gospel response to government. May God help us to think like this and not be shaped by the culture in which we live.

Let's pray together. Father thank You for the time we've been able to spend together, thank You for Your word for its truth, for how clearly it addresses these issues. Lord give us a heart of submission to You, first and foremost, and then to our government, to our government leaders. Help us to respond biblically. Lord help us to understand what we have learned in this passage but then to respond in obedience, to pay our taxes, to obey the law, to honor our leaders, and to pray for our leaders and our nation. Lord give us a heart to do those things. And now Father as we turn our hearts to the Lord's Table I pray that You'd prepare us. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.