

• LESSON 20 (August 31) •

Romans 13:1-7

Subject to the Governing Authorities

As the Holy Spirit continues to lead Paul to describe what it will look like for redeemed sons and daughters of God to present themselves as “living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1-2), he turns our attention to respect for authority. Let’s read the entire context, then take our time thinking through how God is seeking to shape this aspect of obedience in our lives.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (13:1-7)

Having gotten the entire context in mind, let’s take the time to dissect how Christians are to live in relation to the governing authorities.

- ❖ What does it mean to “be subject” to someone or something?



It’s important for us to remember that these words weren’t written to Americans living in the 21st century under a democratically-elected government. These words were written to Christians who lived in the 1st century city of Rome. *Why* is it important for us to remember the original audience of these God-breathed expectations?

Does that mean that Romans 13:1-7 no longer applies to us? If not, why not?

Paul references “the governing authorities” in Romans 13:1, but this is not the only time the attention of Christians is pointed in this direction.

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. (Tit 3:1-2)

Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Pet 2:13-17)

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle [Jesus] in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away. (Matt 22:15-22)

- ❖ In your own words, who are these “governing authorities” Paul references in Romans 13:1, and why should we be subject to them?

- ❖ Take the time to read Daniel 2:20-21 and John 19:10-11. Remember also Paul’s words in Romans 13:1 – “For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” How do these passages further shape our understanding of God, the governing authorities, and our own responsibilities toward them?

- ❖ How might Christians be tempted to “resist” the authorities (Rom 13:2)? And how can we balance this teaching with the precedent set by the apostles in Acts 5:27-29?

- ❖ Romans 13:3-4 describe the work of governing authorities as God has always intended.
 - Why should rulers not be a terror to good conduct, but to bad?
 - In what way are governing authorities “God’s servant” for the “good” of those under their authority?
 - “But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (13:4). Why do even Christians need this warning from the Spirit of God?
- ❖ “Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience” (13:5). What does conscience have to do with this topic?
- ❖ “For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing” (13:6). Of all the things God could be concerned enough to include in his written revelation to mankind, why address the paying of taxes?
- ❖ “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” (13:7). If I am shaped by these God-breathed expectations to live this sort of life, how will they ultimately shape me to have the proper perspective on authority in general?

CLOSING THOUGHT: Few things are more fundamental to the Christian life than genuine respect for authority. We know the ultimate Authority. May we, as disciples of Christ, be lights in the world when it comes to the way we talk, act, and react to those in positions of authority.