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Class Notes

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Submission to God-Ordained Authority

Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1-7 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

I. Main Questions:

1. Why is this passage so important to understand in the Christian life?
2. Paul was writing during the days of the oppressive Roman Empire, which was at many times vigorously opposed to the Christian faith and bitterly persecuted Christians. How does understanding that backdrop help put into perspective Paul's general commands to Christians to submit themselves to the authorities?
3. How does this passage go against the grain of everyone's fleshly tendencies?
4. How is anarchy devilish? How is tyranny also devilish?
5. How is this passage to be tempered by a consideration of the opposite chapter on human government: Revelation 13? How do Romans 13 and Revelation 13 serve as book-ends for the Christian's understanding of human government?
6. How do we harmonize this passage with the assertion in Acts 4:19 and 5:29 which both teach civil disobedience in the face of an immoral law: "We must obey God rather than man."?
7. How is all true authority ultimately from God?
8. What does this passage teach about taxes? Capital punishment?

II. Verse by Verse Questions:

1. How would you define "authority"? (1)
2. What does the word "submit" mean? Why is it vital for Christians to gladly submit by faith to all authorities instituted by God? (1)
3. What is the reason Paul gives in verse 1 for all Christians to submit to all authorities? (1)

4. What does it mean that all authorities have been established by God? (1)
5. How is a Christian to understand the ebbs and flows of history, in that the Romans were in authority only because their pagan legions won battles against some other equally godless armies? (1)
6. What about rebellion against wicked rulers? Should a citizen in Holland during the Nazi occupation submit to the Nazis because they were the God-ordained rulers of the land now that they had invaded? And would it have been a violation of Romans 13 for some Dutch to fight the Nazis in the resistance? (1)
7. What does verse 2 add to Paul's argument? (2)
8. Why does God delegate His authority to created beings? How does God hold those authorities subject to His higher rule? (2)
9. What is rebellion? Is it ever justified? (2)
10. How does verse 3 help explain verse 2? (2-3)
11. What "terror" or "fear" does Paul have in mind in verse 3? Is it always true that rulers hold no terror for those who do right? Again, suppose a Christian decided to resist the Nazi Holocaust in his native Germany by hiding Jews. He is "doing right." Is it true that he need fear nothing from the government? How do you understand verse 3 in this case? (3)
12. How is verse 3 usually true in a country like the USA? (3)
13. How does the ruler "commend" those who do right? (3)
14. What is the significance of Paul's assertion that rulers are "God's servants to do you good"? (4)
15. Do the rulers always recognize that they are "God's servants"? Think of Paul's case, dealing with Rome. Did Caesar look on himself as one of "God's servants"? For a key reference, see Isaiah 45:4, speaking to Cyrus the Great of Persia over a century before he was born: "For the sake of Jacob my servant I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, *though you do not acknowledge me.*" Does the fact that the rulers do not believe in God change Paul's command here? (4)
16. What is the significance of Paul's statement, "He does not bear the sword for nothing"? What is the "sword" Paul has in mind? (4)
17. How do we reconcile capital punishment with the command "You shall not kill?" (4)
18. What is the significance of Paul's statement of the government figure, "he is God's servant, an agent of wrath" (4)
19. What further reason does Paul give in verse 5 for submission to God-ordained authorities? How does "conscience" fit into our submission to government? (5)
20. How does Paul defend the payment of taxes to the government? What is the flow of his argument from verse 5 to 6? (6)
21. How might some Christians in Paul's day had a hard time justifying paying taxes? How might some in our day? What is Paul's response to this? (6)
22. How does verse 7 sum up our general stance toward God-ordained authorities? (7)
23. What is the significance of speaking of reverence and honor? (7)
24. How should an American citizen deal with the King or Queen of another country? Does verse 7 apply in that case? (7)

III. Summary:

Paul commands Christians to submit to God-ordained authorities.

