

Romans 13 Revisited

Romans 13:1-7

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, October 1, 2023

Good morning, everyone. If you would please take your Bibles and turn with me to Romans chapter 13. That's the passage we're in today. I want to apologize for my voice. I do have a cold this morning, but you may not be able to tell. But we're looking in Romans 13, and while you're turning there, you may be wondering why we're looking at this text, since we've already looked at it before in this series on the government. But the reason we're doing that is because this is the longest passage in the New Testament on this subject. So if you're studying this, and going through this topic, you really have to look at it a couple times, it carries on for seven verses from Romans 13:1 all the way through verse seven. And so we're going to look at it again. And I'll look at it in a moment with you to read it.

But just out of curiosity, I was doing some research this week, and I found that this is not the first – we're talking about a lot of history in our government series. But this is not the first time in history, people have looked at Romans 13 to talk about the government. It's been done before. In his book on the Revolutionary War in America, a history professor from the Master's University named Greg Fraser said that before the revolution, Romans 13, was used a lot in the church to learn about this topic. And it was always interpreted to mean the same thing. And that is that the Christian should submit to the governing authorities, we should follow them any way we can, unless they ask us to sin or defy the conscience. Augustine interpreted it that way. The people in the Middle Ages interpreted it that way. So did those in the time of the Reformation. But during the Revolutionary War, the take on this passage changed when the colonists started to break away from England. And when they did that, several pastors began to say that the command to submit to the government only applies when the government is good. Some of you may have heard that that kind of thing is being said today, when it's not good and the government is bad, the whole passage changes. For example, on December 31, 1750, in Boston, Massachusetts, if you saw our Grace For Your Day, we talked about this there, but a pastor by the name of Jonathan Mayhew delivered a sermon on this text, which said that Paul was arguing for submission only to the authorities that perform their duties and lead in a just and reasonable way. And Mayhew said, "When they don't do that, we have to rebel." Not that we can rebel, but we have to rebel. Not that it's an option for the Christian in the church to throw off allegiance to the government, but Mayhew said we must do it. We don't have a choice. It's part of our duty as Christians.

And Fraser's point was that from that time onwards, Romans 13 became a battleground for the church. Because everywhere you went, it seems like in the last 300 years of church history, people landed on two sides of this issue. On one side, you have Christians that believe the Bible teaches nothing but submission, and it tells us to do nothing but follow the governing authorities blindly, completely, totally, no matter the cost because these people feel like they had to do it. Even if the government tells them to sin, they're going to follow because in their minds, Romans 13, is the only verse in the Bible on the subject. There's nothing else in Scripture that talks about the government, but this. And then on the other

side, and the other camp, there were those who taught the opposite. They believe the Bible doesn't teach submission at all. The command is just not even here because they believe Romans 13 has nothing to do with us unless the government performed their duties well and reasonably and just as Jonathan Mayhew said, because if they don't do that, we can ignore this text because it doesn't have anything to do with us. And Fraser's point in the book is that both ideas are wrong. When you look at Scripture, you find it lands somewhere in the midst of all that because it says that we need to submit to the governing authorities and we need to respect them any way we can, but at the same time, that doesn't mean that we submit to everything they tell us because we don't and that doesn't mean that every time the government says something we obey because in the eyes of God we have liberty to say "no" when we need to; the Lord has given us freedom to do that.

To help you see this in this series, we've looked at several examples of this and the lives of people like Peter and Paul and Stephen and Christ and Moses because they all had to defy the government at times. If you remember from the last couple of weeks, we've talked about that. They came to a place where they had to resist them. But now in order to bring this together, I think it would be a good idea to take what we've learned from the past couple of weeks and put it alongside this text as well.

Because Romans 13 has caused a lot of problems for the church. Even today, people still divide over this. I was talking to a pastor from Kelowna recently who told me that he knew of four churches that split in his town during Covid, and it was all over this issue. What does it mean to submit to the governing authorities? What is Paul saying when he puts this verse in here? Does that apply to us? Or does it not? Does God want us to do that when the government goes bonkers? Or does He want us to do something else? That's the kind of thing people were wrestling with to the point that they would come into camps over this. And they would land into factions, until it just tore the church apart. And in order to try to work through that, I think it would be a good idea for us to talk about that today. We don't want that to happen here. We don't know what our leaders are going to do down the road. My guess is it will be something peculiar. They've been acting peculiar fairly recently. But when it happens, I want us to stick together and think through this biblically.

So that's what we're going to talk about this morning; we're going to look at three things Paul says about this issue of submitting to the government in Romans 13. So if you're taking notes, this is our outline, we're just going to walk through this text together. And at the end of it, I want to give you the elders response to the government, like we've been talking about, but there's three things Paul says about the issue of submission.

The first one is that there is a command in Romans 13 to submit, and the first thing we see here in the text is that there is a command to submit. Which means that wherever you fall on this, whatever camp you land into, no matter your thoughts on Romans 13, it does begin with a call to do it. And you've got to wrestle with that before you move on. Now, in order to understand what Paul is saying, it's good to back up for a moment and talk about the book of Romans as a whole. If you're in our men's Bible study

on Tuesday nights, this will be familiar territory for you. We've been learning a lot about that. But when you look at the book of Romans, I really liked our songs this morning, because they tie into the theme of Romans, Romans is about the gospel, Amen? It tells us how we can be saved by the mercy of God. If you want to write this verse down, Romans 1:16, it's a good key verse in the book. It says, "For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." And that's important because it shows you that the book of Romans tells us how the gospel changes us by its power.

You hear the word "power" in that verse, and that word "power" is a Greek word *dynamis* from which we get dynamite. And the idea is that just like you can't throw a stick of dynamite into the room and expect nothing to change. So you can't throw the gospel in there and expect nothing to change changes everything, you put the gospel in someone's life, it'll change their morals, values, and principles. You put Jesus Christ into their world, it'll change their attitude, thoughts, and feelings. It'll change the way they look at their family. It'll change the way they look at their friends. It'll change the way they look at the culture. And Paul says here in Romans 13, it will change the way you look at government.

That's something we all need. We all need someone to help change us in this department. It's hard to think of the government as a Christian, it's so bad today. We don't know what to do with it. And that's what this chapter is about in the context of the book. And this is why Paul says this in chapter 13. In his mind, this is what God wants you to do with the government when the Gospel comes into your life, and I'm going to explain this. He says in verse one of chapter 13, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities."

Now, what does that mean? I mean, of all the things to talk about here and all the ways the gospel could change us in the area of government, why does he mention subjection? There's a lot of different ideas about that in commentaries and a lot of different thoughts. One that I found helpful was Paul mentions this because he understands this is not the only thing the Bible says about the government. There's a lot of other passages that talk about this issue. And they tell you how to do things like resist and defy and stand up to them when you have to. We've been talking about that. But Paul doesn't go into that in Romans 13 because in this text, he's just focusing on one thing, and that is submission. Now, this is not the only verse in the Bible on the government. And this is not the only way you are to look at it. This is just the way he chose to look at it here because he wants us to know that when we have to resist, and we have to defy the government, this chapter goes alongside all that. The two things are not extremes. On the one hand, God wants you to stand up to the government when it's necessary. On the other hand, there is a principle of submission, there's a balance in all this.

And before I get into some of that, I want to explain that more in a moment, let me just say, the phrase "be in subjection" here, that's actually one word in Greek: *hypotassō*. It's a compound word from *hupo*, under and *tasso*, to put. It means to put something under or follow the lead of it. The same word was used of soldiers in the army to describe how they would line up under their senior commander and go to

war with him and fight because when they did that, they wouldn't fight however they wanted to, there was a sense of order in the army. And in a similar way, Paul is saying there's a sense of order in the world. As part of that order, the Lord has given the institution of government to be an authority for us. It's not the ultimate authority, that belongs to God alone. It's not the supreme rulership over a Christian's life, that belongs to Christ, but it is a lesser one in a sense.

He also adds, if you look in the verse, this is for every person. Let's see that there. It means that wherever you are, wherever government you land in, this is for you, whether it's Canada, or the U.S., or China, or North Korea. A good government or a bad one, this principle is kind of still there, needs to be thought through.

He says this is for the governing authorities in the text, that's plural. It's not one authority, but multiple authorities. Not just one political leader, but numerous ones, whether they be federal or municipal. The same holds true for all of that. And here's why. If you look in verse one, because it says, "For there is no authority, except from God, and those which exist are established or created by God." Because this is what God did. He created the idea of government; we could call it government with a capital G. This is how He set up the world. He did it by giving us the institution of the state. That's not an accident. It's not random that you go anywhere in the world, and there'll be a government there. That's how the Lord ordained the world or orchestrated the world.

I've told you before, if you remember your Bible history, you'll recall that after God made Adam and Eve, they had two sons named Cain and Abel. And Genesis 4:17 says after murdering Abel, Cain goes on to get married and builds a city. That's the first city in the Bible. If you want to write the name down, it was called the city of Enoch, it was named after his son. How many people were there, we don't know and how big it was, it doesn't say; but that's how old the idea of government is in the Bible. It goes all the way back to the beginning of time. There weren't millions of years before governments formed, they were there all the way stretching back to Genesis. Because as the Lord creates mankind, they form a family, they have children, and they build a government.

Now, after saying all that, let me just stop for a moment and say, as you read this text, and you start diving into it, you can tell what it's about from the beginning. It's about the idea of submission. It's not about resistance. It's not about defying. It's about that. If Paul wants us to defy the government here, he would have said this differently in the text. And if he wanted us to resist, he wouldn't have put it like this. Now, that does not mean the Bible doesn't talk about resistance. And that doesn't imply that Paul did not believe there was a time to defy the governing authorities. Paul defied the governing authorities. Paul resisted, so obviously he believed that that's to go alongside this. The point is he's just not saying it here. And that's just not on his mind as he's writing this part of the Bible, which is why nobody interpreted it that way for the first 1,700 years of the church. Now, you may say, "Well, why is that important, Pastor Jeremy?" Well, it's important because Paul wanted us to submit to the government, even when we have to defy at times. It's not one or the other. And he wants us to follow them in some

things, even when we have to disobey in others. It's not this camp or that camp, there's some kind of balance here. As a Christian, you don't get to the point where you say, "I don't need the government anymore." Now, you might get to the point where you say, "I want to help change the government. And I want to help, maybe bring in a new government and work through all that kind of stuff." But you don't come to the place where you say, "I don't want to have anything to do with this institution."

Some of you will remember that several weeks ago, I spent some time talking about the different theories that are out there on the subject of church and state. And we talked about the doctrines of Dominionism, and Separatism, and what those mean and how they're different from each other. But there was another one I didn't have time to go into. And that was the position of anarchy, or anarchism, it comes from a Latin word, *ana* without and *archai*, ruler, it's a system of politics that has no ruler, there's no one looking after it whatsoever that does what it wants, however it wants, with no sense of direction at all. And I mention that because the way some people talk today, it seems like they want to go back to that. And they would rather have anarchy than this government or that government. But when you look at history, you find that that's not true. Anarchy is a terrible system. Everywhere it's been, it left a trail of devastation in its way.

For an example, it wasn't too long ago that several major cities in the United States were concerned about the police there, you guys remember that. And they thought it was corrupt. They started saying, "Defund the police and get the police out of town." And so they started riding to drive them away. And in some of those cities, the government left certain pockets of town for a while. And when they did, what happened, it was just a disaster. I had friends that were living in some of those areas. There was panic in the streets, there was looting and fighting. And it didn't stop until the government came back to restore law and order. That's what it's put on this earth to do. You see all kinds of Hollywood movies today that will say like, "If you just get rid of the government go live out in the woods, everybody will be happy." No, they won't; they will fight in the woods. I mean, the government's not perfect. That's not what Paul is saying here. There's no way you could say that about the government of Rome. And it's not flawless. That's not the idea. The idea is that the government has been given by God just to do certain things and to bring structure to society.

That's where the principle of submission comes in. If you believe in the separation of church and state, then you have to believe the church can't do everything in the world. There are some things that are just outside of what God has called us to do, like break up a riot at the point of a gun. I'm a pastor, and I don't think people should riot and my heart was broken over. And I have friends that live in Los Angeles, but I never saw it as my calling to go down there with a rifle and back everybody off. That's the job of the police. And what Paul is doing here is asking us to acknowledge that and just respond accordingly.

I don't know if you've heard the name William Wilberforce before, you're going to hear some more in a couple of weeks as I want to talk about his life, but he was the one who was responsible for ending

slavery in England in the 18th century. And he did it as a member of parliament. He got saved while he was in government. And a lot of people asked him, "Well, how do you work in such a corrupt system?" because England was just a mess. And he said, "I can do it because I've learned to follow my earthly king when he's right in God's eyes, and to follow my heavenly King when he's not. And I don't make it any more complicated than that." If you can obey the government, do it. If you can't, then don't. But try to keep it as simple as you can.

And that brings us to another thing Paul says about the issue of government and submission here in Romans 13, and that is that there are reasons for doing it. So first, it gives a command to do it in verse one. But what he's going to do now is going to give you some reasons for submission. Paul probably understood that what he's saying is hard. You're living in the Roman Empire, it's gonna be very difficult to want to submit to the government, nobody would want to do that. So he gives you an explanation for this. There's five reasons. We're gonna go through these one at a time pretty quickly.

The first one is that government comes from God. And we've already talked about that a little bit. But let me say a little more here. The government comes from God, government with a capital G, the institution of government, the concept of government. If you look in verse one, he says. "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." Now, if you pay close attention here to the wording, you can see there's a change in terminology between the first verse and the second, you might catch that. In the first sentence, he mentions the governing authorities, plural, that's several governing authorities, multiple governing authorities. In the second sentence, he mentioned authority, singular, and that's important. Because what Paul is saying is that the authority comes from God, not just an authority, or one authority, or this one or that one, but every authority with a capital A. If you take authority, political authority, back far enough, you always see God's standing in front of it, in His sovereignty. And if you trace every government or nation back to its source, you will find Him at the beginning because history is His story. He reigns over it. And that's what this is saying. I'm not saying God approves of what the government's doing. Of course He doesn't most of the time. It's just saying that He is reigning over it. It's a comforting thought. And if you want to tie this into the doctrine of submission in the first part of the verse, that means you can follow the government when you have to knowing God is sovereign. He's in control. Justin Trudeau is not the one ultimately calling shots in Canada. Joe Biden is not the one ultimately running things in the States. Vladimir Putin is not the one steering the ship in Russia, not in a heavenly point of view. God is. You can lay your head down on the pillow and sleep at night knowing He'll take care of all that. There will be a judgment day for those guys; He will hold them accountable.

That brings it to a second reason why he tells us to submit here, and that is because there is condemnation if you don't. You need to submit because there's consequences or condemnation, if you choose not to. And I'm just following the text here. If you put verses one and two together, it says,

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.

Now, if you're looking closely at your Scripture, again, you're going to see the word "authority" in the NASB Bible is singular in verse two, again. if you have a pen, you might want to underline that or put a star beside it because Paul is not saying, "Whoever resists authorities will be condemned, but whoever resists authority in general, the whole idea of authority, the whole point of authority." The principle is that it's not wrong to defy the government when you have to, it's wrong to defy them when you don't. He's not saying condemnation comes when you defy over biblical things, it comes when you defy over nothing. Because you just don't like them. You shouldn't do that. This is what's known as an argument from the greater to the lesser. The greater authority is God. He's the one ruling everything, and therefore we should put ourselves under the lesser of rulers that He has established whenever possible. There's a lot of consequences when you don't. One is that it just makes the government angry. That's what the word condemnation means here. It's not referring to eternal condemnation. It's just a common sense kind of way of saying, when you defy the government, they throw the book at you and don't do that if you don't have to. Don't wind up in jail for no reason.

It brings you to another reason to submit and that is because the government is a minister of good. That's what he says next here in the passage. If you follow along here in verse four, it says, "For the government is a minister of God to you for good." That's another way of saying the government is a deacon for good. The same word "minister" is the word "deacon." It's saying the government's job is to help and support you like a deacon does or to aid and assist you like a servant. And that sounds strange because there's a lot of times when the government is doing the opposite. So what's Paul referring to? He's saying that the government provides things like a police force and military and fire department. And they do things for you, like give you an army and a navy and the Coast Guard. And they give you a system of roads and streets and sewers and utilities and public services and public transportation. That's how it's a minister of good. Paul is not saying here that the government does that perfectly. And he's not telling you that it's good because they do it with proper motives. They often don't. He's just saying they're good because they just do them. There's a lot of beneficial things that happen from the government in the world.

A fourth reason that he mentions here is that the government bears a sword. Verse four says, "But if you do what is evil, be afraid for the government does not bear the sword for nothing." The idea of sword alludes to the fact that the government has power over life and death. Whenever a Roman judge would sentence someone to death in the first century, they would take out their sword, and point it at them to say, "This is what's coming for you. You did the crime, now you're going to pay." And with this in mind, Paul says the government is the institution on Earth that has been given the right to do that. It's the only institution I'm aware of that God has made that has the freedom to kill someone for the purpose of upholding law and order and justice. The church can't do that. That's not been given to you and me. We

can church discipline someone, and we can confront their sin; you don't have the right to take them out back and stone them.

This verse raises the question that people often ask, “Well, does the Bible teach capital punishment?” I think it does. And does it say that God approves of the death penalty? Well, He approved of it in the Old Testament, this just seems to be following a carryover from that. That's how He keeps sin from spreading on the earth. He does it through the threat of violence. In Israel, the sin would have taken over the camp if they didn't threaten this kind of thing. In Canada and the U.S. if there wasn't some kind of threat of force, can you imagine what people would do?

It brings into a final reason here, why you submit to the government in Romans 13, is for the sake of conscience. You see this one in verse five. Because when you come to verse five, Paul is kind of rounding off his argument here in this section, because he uses the word “subjection” again, to take you back to where he started in verse one. And he says, “Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath,” or to avoid wrath or to stay away from wrath, “but for the sake of conscience.” Your conscience is the part of your soul that helps identify right from wrong. It's the inner voice inside your heart that helps you weigh motives and make evaluations of them. It's like a smoke alarm that goes off when there is sin because it says, “Danger, danger, danger, warning, wake up and stop this, God is not pleased.” And Paul is mentioning it here because when you disobey the government repeatedly over nothing, you begin to harden your conscience. And when you just break the law for nothing at all, you begin to weaken it. He's just encouraging you not to do that. I think we've all had the experience of leaving church and going down the road. And you're going 30 kilometers per hour in a 20. And all of a sudden, there's this pain inside, right? Oh, I shouldn't do that. Paul says you don't want to get used to that in the Christian life. Be very aware of your conscience in these things.

Now at this point in the passage, I think it would be good to stop again and ask another question. We just asked what's the main principle of this text? But let's ask this question. What did Paul's audience think as they read this? Now, this was not written to you and me first, right? We're not the original audience. The church at Rome is the original audience. So what kind of impact would this have upon the church in Rome? I think as they read this, they would be saying to themselves, “Now, wait a minute, Paul. You're telling us to submit to the government, and we get that and you're saying we need to obey and here's all these reasons: the government comes from God and it's good and it bears the sword, but the problem is Paul, the government doesn't always do this.” I mean, I think we're living in a in a country that's heading toward the direction of Rome, but I think we're still not there just yet. But even in Canada, you got to read this list and say, “Look that the government doesn't always act like they come from God.” They act like they come from Satan sometimes. And they don't behave like servants. They behave like tyrants. And they don't use the sword to always protect us; sometimes they use it to punish. So what do we do about that?

And I think if you put this verse along with other verses in the Bible that we've talked about, Paul would say you can resist them. I think he would say you can defy, just be wise about it. Remember who you're up against, you're up against the government, realize who you're messing with. You're messing with Caesar and Rome, in their case, and he's not going to take it lightly if you do; so just pick and choose your battles. Don't fight them over every little thing that doesn't matter; fight them over things that matter.

Some people don't do this today. They want to battle the government over everything. The government tells him to wear a seatbelt they want to fight over that. The government tells them to stop at a stop sign, they want to fight over that. The government tells them to drive on the right-hand side of the road, pay their taxes, don't trespass, don't fish in the Fraser River without a license, and they want to just struggle with all those things. I think Paul would say, "Well, there's no reason to do that. You're gonna have plenty of things to resist them over. Just don't do it on everything."

You know, as I was researching Romans 13, I've put a lot of work into this, just because I want to understand it from my own life. And I found that some churches and Christian communities are so eager to fight the government, that they try to put the idea of civil disobedience in here. And they're so worked up about things right now, and understandably so, I get that, but they look at Romans 13 and want to make it a test case for resistance. The problem with that is that as you read the passage, and just take it as it stands, that's just not what Paul is talking about here. He's not going into the issue of resistance in this passage. So if you want to learn about that, you can go other places; there's plenty of places to talk about it. In fact, I knew how important this was for the life of the church. And so I went to my office downtown this week, and I shut myself up in there for a couple of hours and lock the door and turn the phone off, and I pulled out 20 different commentaries on Romans. And I read through them. And they came from people you would recognize like John MacArthur and Calvin and Matthew Henry and Martyn Lloyd Jones, and all but maybe two or three of them, they said that this passage does not touch on the topic of civil disobedience. And of the ones that said that it did, or it might do that, they said that even though disobedience could be implied in here, you don't learn anything about it specifically, it just doesn't go into that.

Well, one author said this, the commentator William Hendriksen said, "Paul does not within the compass of these few words, give us a complete treatise on every aspect of government. He never tells us how to respond when they overstep their bounds because such matters are just beyond his sphere of attention in this text. He points out that the command is to submit and to *hypotasso*, put ourselves under, and other things just aren't being talked about here." I think many of you are familiar with the name Jerry Wragge. But Jerry Wragge spoke on this some time ago in his church in Florida. And he said that when he started ministering there, the whole issue of government really came to the forefront in the 1980s in the US with the arrival of Roe versus Wade, and the law to legalize abortion. That's what the churches was really struggling with at that time. Recently here, it's been Covid. It's been Covid in the U.S. but at that time it was abortion. And when the law was passed, people were asking the question,

what do we do with this? And some of them were turning to Romans 13 and other passages in the Bible to justify blocking abortion centers, protesting at them and some of them were blowing them up. They believe that some of these texts were telling them that in order to get the government back on track, they should use violence. And Jerry Wrage pointed out in the sermon that's as far away from Paul's mind here as you can get. He's not telling you what to do when the government legalizes abortion. It's just not the focus of the chapter. If you want to learn about something like that, we need to open our Scriptures to other texts like we've done in previous weeks when we looked at all these examples.

It brings us to one other thing that Paul tells us about submission in this chapter. Let me just review these other ones with you quickly. If you're taking notes, the first thing he tells us is that there's a command to submit. Secondly, there are several reasons for doing it. And the reasons we looked at are as follows: he says we should submit because the government comes from God, there is condemnation if you don't, it's a minister of good, it bears the sword, and it would hurt the conscience if we refuse. And to be honest, as you read all that, I mean, it makes the government sound like a good guy. I mean, I think this is where some of the confusion comes from it sounds like he's putting them on a pedestal and bragging on them, but he's not. He's just talking about this from the positive side of things. If Paul wanted to talk about the negative side, I think it would go on longer than five verses, don't you? It could go on for many verses; it's just not on the radar in this text.

It takes you to one more thing that he tells us about submission here in this chapter, and that is that there are practical ways to do it. A third thing he tells us about submission in Romans 13, just to round the text off here is that there are practical ways to do it. After talking about this topic in the first five verses or so, Paul starts to kind of buckle down at the end. And he answers the question. "Okay, well, what does this look like practically?" We've talked about it from the high perspective, talking about government as an authority with a capital A, and all this type of stuff. But let's put it down on the grassroots level.

What does this look like in our day-to-day lives? A couple of things he mentions. One is you need to pay taxes. That's hard to hear. I don't think any of us like paying taxes. My sons aren't here so I can tell this story, but I took my little boy to the store the other day, he wanted to buy a little toy and it said \$5 on the box, takes it to the front desk. They say I want \$6.50; He was shocked. Hey, buddy, this is the way the world is. It has taxes. He was a happy kid most times; he was quiet all the way home. Verse six says this it says, "For because of this, you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God." When Paul says rulers are servants of God here, that's a strange thing to read. Our rulers don't always seem like servants of God. They seem like they serve other things. But Paul says they're servants of God in this sense. They're servants of His sovereignty. They bow down to His sovereign will. That's what this is referring to, which is why the verse goes on to say to render our taxes to them. The word "render" means to reimburse them. The idea is that you use the government's roads, so reimburse them for their roads. And you use their police force, so reimburse them for their police, and you use their fire departments, so reimburse them for the fire department through your taxes. The word "render" is also in the continuous tense, it

means we do this continually. So if they ask for your taxes this month, you pay them this month. If they ask them next month, you do it next month. If you have a concern about them, you can protest through the proper channels, but you do need to go along with that because they are servants of God's sovereign will.

We studied the life of Jesus a couple of weeks ago, and we saw that He said a similar thing to the Pharisees in Matthew 22. They approached Him and asked Him about taxes. And He told them these words, He uses the same word here, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God, what is God's." And that means that Caesar is not God; he doesn't deserve everything. You don't give him anything he wants, but you do give him something. You do need to pay him the money that's requested through the tax system.

That brings us to another practical way to submit the government here, and this one is even stranger than the first one the way it's worded; and that is to fear them. It mentions in verse seven to give tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom is due, the word custom is connected to the word tax, and then fear to whom fear is due. I don't know about you. But that sounds very unusual to me. First, he calls them, the government, God's servants. Now he tells us to fear them. Some have said that Paul is saying we should fear God in this part of the verse, and it is true that we should fear God. But in the context, remember, he is talking about government. And I think the meaning of this is found, if you look back up again, in verse three, when it says, "Do you want to have no fear of authority?" It's the same theme there. Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. That seems to be what he's saying when he says, "Give fear to whom fear is due." He's come to the end of the paragraph. Now, he's starting to wrap things up. And Paul just wants to remind you one more time at the end, "Don't cause any unnecessary trouble with the government. Have a sense of caution." I think that's what the word fear is describing. Trouble is going to come from the government, don't worry about that. And there are going to be plenty of opportunities to defy, just be wise about how you handle it.

And then one more practical way to submit at the end, and that is to honour them. The last phrase in the verse here finishes out the list when it says, "Give honour to whom honour is due." That refers to a lot of things, honouring someone, it can refer to your attitude. You can't honour someone without having a good attitude toward them and holding them in high esteem, not necessarily because of their character and the way they're conducting themselves, but because of their office. You're just having a good attitude for the office. I think this can refer to our words about the government as well, and the way we talk about them. We all have a tendency to say nice things when political leaders are in the room, but the moment their back is turned, we shred them up. I think Paul doesn't want us to do that. And this also could refer to prayer. You can honour your leaders through prayers. And I'm noticing our prayer time on Sunday mornings, our people are praying for the government. And even in our prayer time during the service, I'm hearing prayers directed toward that. That's a very biblical, good thing to do.

And at this point, if you notice in the passage, Paul is done with the discussion of government. After saying all this, he brings it to a close and he talks about something else in verse eight. And he starts telling you how the gospel changes you in another place. Remember, this is what the book of Romans is about. It tells us how the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ transforms us in every aspect of life. The whole book is summarized in the verse I read to you earlier, "For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God." And that means it's the power of God to forgive me. The gospel is the power of God to redeem me. The gospel is the power of God to renew me. And it's the power of God to transform the way I look at anything, including government.

And again, I know we've talked about this several times in recent weeks. So I don't want to say anything more here, other than to point out that the reason I'm going through this again, is because I do want us to be united over these things. To be honest, we don't know what the government is going to do here in Canada in the months and years to come. It's pretty unstable right now. If you watch the news, you'll know that there's a lot of talks about bringing the mandates back. And some of our leaders are alluding to the fact that they want to return to the way things were under Covid when you had to wear a mask and get a shot and lock things down potentially. And all that's very concerning. And several people in the congregation have asked a very good question. Well, what are we going to do if that happens? And I've told you before that our elders have met, and we've discussed that at length, and I want to read to you the response that we've come up with. This is going to be available to you in the foyer after the service. So if you want a copy of this, just ask one of our elders and we'd be happy to give you one of these but let me read the whole document to you. It's several pages. But it says this, it says,

Over the past several years, there has been an ongoing rise in conflict between the church and the state all across the globe. It started with COVID-19 and the issues surrounding it but the trouble has not stopped there which has raised the question as to how Grace Fellowship Church Chilliwack will respond to the government in the future specifically as it relates to government lock-downs for the church. In order to answer that question for our congregation, we would like to make the following statement:

- 1). We believe that Hebrews 10:25 commands Christians to not forsake the assembling together of the church as is the habit of some.ⁱ
- 2). We believe that consistent, regular involvement in the church is vital to the spiritual life of a believer. God has given us the corporate ministries of the church in order to encourage our walk with Christ and strengthen our spiritual health which is why Christians need to prioritize them as much as possible.
- 3). We believe that the church is designed by God to have a public presence in this world. To borrow some images from the Bible, it is called to be a lampstand (Revelation 1:12-16), salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), a city on a hill (Matthew 5:14), the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), and the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15) in order to signify the fact that it needs to be seen and not hidden. Therefore, any time the church shuts down for a prolonged

period of time, it not only impacts the lives of individual Christians in a negative way but it hurts the entire community.

4). We believe that Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17 commands Christians to submit to the governing authorities.

5). We do not believe that the statement that the government “is a minister of God to you for good” (Romans 13:4) means that a government loses all its authority if it does not behave in a good and honorable way towards its citizens. We hold to the separation of the church and state which means that it is not the job of the church to replace the government if it does what is evil. We can confront it but we cannot step into its role and take its place.

6). We believe that disobedience to the civil authorities is clearly found in the Bible in the following places:

- the example of the Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1:15-22)
- the example of Moses’ parents when they hid him as a baby (Exodus 2:1-10)
- the example of Moses when he led the people of Israel out of Egypt even when the armies of Egypt came after them (Exodus 5-14)
- the example of Rahab when she refused to tell the king of Jericho where the spies were (Joshua 2)
- the example of Obadiah in hiding the prophets of the Lord (1 Kings 18:3-4)
- the example of Elijah when he confronted the prophets of Baal and killed them even though they were favored by Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 18:1-40)
- the example of Jehosheba in saving Joash from the slaughter of Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11:1-3)
- the example of Mordecai when he refused to bow down to Haman (Esther 3:1-6)
- the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in refusing to bow before the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3)
- the example of Daniel in his refusal to cease praying (Daniel 6)
- the example of the wise men when they refused to tell Herod where Jesus was born (Matthew 2:1-12)
- the example of Jesus in refusing to keep the Pharisees’ traditions concerning what was “not lawful to do on a Sabbath” (Matthew 12:1-14)
- the example of John the Baptist when he confronted King Herod for marrying Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip (Mark 6:14-29)
- the example of Peter and John in continuing to speak about what they had seen and heard about Jesus (Acts 4:13-20)
- the example of Peter and the Apostles when they told the leaders of the Jews that “We must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:17-32)
- the example of Stephen’s defence and consequent stoning before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7)
- the example of the early church when they scattered as a result of persecution (Acts 8:1)
- the example of Paul’s escape from Damascus (Acts 9:23-25)
- the example of James’ martyrdom at the hands of King Herod (Acts 12:1-2)
- the example of Peter’s escape from prison (Acts 12:1-19)

- the example of Paul and Silas when they were arrested in Philippi (Acts 16:14-40).
- the example of those who refuse to worship the image of the beast in the latter days (Revelation 13:11-16)

7). We believe that the underlying principle of civil disobedience is stated very succinctly in the words that Peter and the Apostles spoke before the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:29: “We must obey God rather than man.” In other words, there are times when the laws of the government contradict the laws of God and, when that occurs, Christians need to decide where their ultimate priorities lie and that is with the Lord.

As a result of these considerations, we have reached the following conclusion. While we do not know what the future decisions of our government will be concerning lock-downs, we are committed to following these biblical guidelines as we respond to it. We do feel that there is a place for the church to defy the governing authorities. Civil disobedience is exemplified and demonstrated in the Bible. Obedience to the Word of God does not mean that we have to follow every rule, law, or ordinance that our political leaders come up with regarding the church. We will strive to keep our church open in any way possible as we believe that is what is best for the spiritual health of our people. At the same time, we will also make every effort to act respectfully towards the government as “there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Romans 13:1).

First Timothy 2:1-6 says:

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

May the Lord grant us grace as we seek to apply this passage to our lives.

Sincerely,

The Elders of GFC

I wanted to read all of that to you as an elder board because I want you to know where we stand on this. We want to do our best to keep the church open anyway possible. And we want to do all we can to keep meeting as believers as we believe that's what's best for our people. Now, having said that, we don't own our own building here. And this is not our property at Riverside Drive, so if the landlords say we can't open up, we'll put our heads together and figure out what to do. But as you heard, in the words of the document, we think the church needs to have a public presence in the world, in our church, in any church. And so with that in mind, why don't we close in a word of prayer? By the way, we're going to have a quarterly meeting after the service, but if you have any thoughts or questions about that document, please come see us as elders. We would love to talk to you about that. Let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank You, Lord, for what we have learned in the book of Romans this morning. It is a serious time to be a Christian anywhere in the world, but particularly in North America and the nation of Canada. Our leaders are making decisions that in many ways just don't make sense to us. We don't understand why they talk the way they do about some of these things. So Father, we need courage. We need wisdom to face the future. Give us grace as a church to be bold in these times, but also to learn how to be as Jesus said, as wise as serpents and innocent as doves, and balance all of these things.

Father, thank You, as we've learned in history, and we've learned in the Bible, we're not the first ones to face wicked governments. We're not the first believers to encounter politicians that make wrongful decisions. It's been done before. Lord, thank You for the examples of that we've looked at of men and women that were bold for Christ, bold for You. And as they did, they did have to defy, but they did it in a God honouring way. We want to always respond in those ways when we have to, but we're praying this morning for grace to know how to do that in each and every circumstance.

Father, I do pray a special prayer for the members of our church, as they don't just interact with these things on a on a big high level, they have to do a day to day in their work. They have to interact with these conversations with their neighbors. They have times when they're sitting in the office and someone comes in says, "Hey, what do You think about this?" And it's a very, very touchy thing to talk about it. Would You give them grace for that, Lord, that they would be as we're going to talk about next week salt and light and a light for Christ in this dark world as they go to work, raise their families, and seek to honour You day by day?

We lift up these things in Christ's name. We thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ as we've sung about this morning, the One who gives us victory over all things, including this dark and evil world. We pray this in His name. Amen.

ⁱ Some have wondered if this verse is a *command* or simply an *encouragement* because the phrase "not forsaking our own assembling together" in Hebrews 10:25 is not in the command tense. However, it is a participle that modifies the verb "let us consider" in verse 24 which gives it the same force as a command. A. W. Pink summarizes it well when he says, "The Greek word for 'not forsaking' is a very strong and emphatic one, being a double compound and signifies 'to abandon in time of danger.' It is the word used by the agonizing Redeemer on the Cross, when He cried, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me' (Matthew 27:46)? It was used by Him again when He declared, 'Thou wilt not forsake my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption' (Acts 2:27). It is the word employed by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:10, 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' It is found in only one other place in this epistle, where it is an obvious antithesis from the verse now before us: 'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee' (13:5). Thus, it will appear that a total and final abandonment of the public profession of Christianity is what is here warned against" (*Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954) 607). In other words, this does not imply that a Christians *sins* every time that he misses church anymore than he sins every time he misses his time of Bible study or prayer. However, it does mean that he sins if he misses church habitually ["as some are in the habit of doing"] because he has turned his back on it.