



The Kingdom Perspective

The Limits of Human Authority

Hello! This is Pastor Don of Christ Redeemer Church. Welcome to The Kingdom Perspective!

In Romans 13 the early church leader the Apostle Paul, issued a radical statement to the Christians in Rome. He said:

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 has been misused over the years by some in authority to *demand* that those under them blindly and unreservedly obey. But this is not at all what Paul says. Paul doesn't command the Roman authorities to force their authority upon the people. This is not addressed to the Roman authorities at all! In other words, God doesn't say to Caesar: "I've given you unlimited authority, so do as you please." No! Quite the opposite.

He is saying that all human authority is a form of delegated authority. It doesn't lie in the person or the office, but ultimately in God, the author of all things (N.B. the connection of "author" to "authority").

This was a radical idea in the history of the world. No human being has any legitimate authority except to the extent given as a stewardship from the throne of heaven.

Now, certainly, this means that Roman Christians (and we) therefore should be respectful of those in authority. Rulers are ministers/servants of God (Romans 13:4), as Paul will go on to say; and we should expect to be accountable to them. But just as important, it tells us that no earthly authority is ultimate. All authority is itself accountable to the Divine Authority of heaven. Human government is designed by God to be essentially and necessarily limited, for it is a delegated authority of a higher power.

And that's something to think about from The Kingdom Perspective.

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~ Romans 13:1-7 (NASB95)

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