

Title: Submission to Authority: A Christian's Duty and Witness

Text: Romans 13:1-7

Imagine a young bird perched on the edge of its nest, ready to take its first flight. The bird's mother, sensing its hesitation, encourages it with gentle chirps. She knows it's time for her little one to leave the nest and soar into the sky.

Reluctantly, the young bird spreads its wings and takes a leap of faith into the open air. It flutters its wings nervously, unsure of what lies ahead. But as it begins to trust its own instincts and the design of its wings, something remarkable happens.

The wind catches the bird's feathers, lifting it higher and higher. The young bird realizes that by surrendering to the natural laws of flight, it is carried effortlessly through the air. In its submission to the principles of flight, the bird experiences the freedom and exhilaration it had never known before.

In this illustration, the young bird's submission to the natural laws of flight represents our submission to the authority that God has established in our lives. Just as the bird trusts in the laws of nature, we are called to trust in God's sovereignty and the authorities He has placed over us.

Submitting to authority doesn't mean blindly following without question. It means recognizing that God, in His wisdom, has appointed those in authority for a purpose. When we submit to authority, whether it be in our families, workplaces, or communities, we demonstrate our trust in God's sovereignty and His ability to work through imperfect human structures.

By submitting to authority, we allow God to work through those in leadership positions, even when we may not fully understand their decisions. We acknowledge that God can use all things for His purposes and that our obedience and trust in Him is ultimately what matters.

Just as the young bird experiences freedom and fulfillment by surrendering to the principles of flight, we can experience true freedom and fulfillment when we submit to God's authority and trust in His sovereignty. In doing so, we align ourselves with His divine plan, and He can lead us to greater heights and blessings beyond what we could have imagined.

Main Idea: Submission to Authority Shows Your Trust in God's Sovereignty

Interrogative: Why should I?

Transition: Three powerful reasons from the text...

1. Resisting Authority is Resisting God (vs. 1-2)

Romans 13:1–2 ESV

¹ 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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

Frankly, the words “be subject” or “submit” cause most people (including Christians) a visceral response of repulsion.

Yet Paul lays out another way Christians are to function in this world.

He says, there are governing authorities that have authority over us.

Certainly, as Christians, we have governing authorities in our lives.

- Employer/Employee
- Church / Elder and congregation
- Parents, children
- Husband, wife relationships
- Government - Local, State, and National.

While we all have these authorities in our lives in one way or another. I do think Paul is referring to the last one on my list - Government.

Now we may rail against this at times, but we must come to terms with what Paul is saying here...

Every Christian must submit to the government authorities.

This is, in one sense how we fulfill Paul’s command in the last verses.

Romans 12:14–21 ESV

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And the very next verse is “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.”

That’s interesting. Remember, there are no verses or chapters in Paul’s original letter. Those were added in the 1200’s.

So, the context is still “Marks of a true Christian.”

And Paul’s point is a Christian isn’t a rabble-rouser, a Christian is a peace seeker and maker.

1 Thessalonians 4:9–11 ESV

⁹ Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,

Why should Christians be subject to every authority? The next part of the verse tells us why...

It's all from God!

Romans 13:1–2 ESV

¹ 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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

John Stott - It is that the state's authority is derived from God, and this he affirms three times.

1. There is no authority except that which God has established (1b).
2. The authorities that exist have been established by God (1c).
3. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted (2a).

*Thus the state is a divine institution with divine authority. Christians are not anarchists or subversives. **The Message of Romans 1. The Authority of the State (1–3)***

Woah, wait a minute? Are we just supposed to be pacifists?

*John Stott - We need to be cautious, however, in our interpretation of Paul's statements. He cannot be taken to mean that all the Caligulas, Herods, Neros and Domitians of New Testament times, and all the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins and Saddams of our times, were personally appointed by God, that God is responsible for their behaviour, or that their authority is in no circumstances to be resisted. Paul means rather that all human authority is derived from God's authority, so that we can say to rulers what Jesus said to Pilate, 'You would have no power [exousia, authority] over me if it were not given to you from above.' Pilate misused his authority to condemn Jesus; nevertheless, the authority he used to do this had been delegated to him by God. **The Message of Romans 1. The Authority of the State (1–3)***

Hebrews 10:31 ESV

³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

John Piper addresses this...

Why Would Paul Write This?

I think Paul, if he heard us say that, he would say, "Listen, here is what I am doing. Number one, Caesar is going to read this, and I will want to make sure that the ruling authorities in

Rome know that Christians are not anarchists. We are basically law abiding citizens and we believe that he has his position by God.” That is the first thing.

And the second thing, I think he wants to say to Christians, “Don't get your back up so easily, because being wronged by a government sends nobody to hell, but being rebellious and angry and bitter and spiteful does send people to hell. And so it is a much greater evil for you to be rebellious than of the government to mistreat you. Much greater evil for you that is.” - <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/does-romans-13-prohibit-all-civil-disobedience>

Listen, all authority has been put into place by God himself. And so, when you resist that authority, you are resisting God.

Do what the government says. Live quiet and peaceable lives. Focus your energy on making disciples, not changing the government.

Review - Submission to Authority Shows Your Trust in God’s Sovereignty

a. Resisting Authority is Resisting God

2. Recognizing Authority’s Responsibility Aids in Submitting to It (vs. 3-4)

Romans 13:3–4 ESV

³ 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, ⁴ 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.

In these verses, Paul emphasizes the role of civil authorities and their relationship to God. He asserts that those who do what is right and just have no reason to fear the rulers or those in authority. He suggests that if one desires to live without fear of punishment, they should act in accordance with the laws and moral standards set by the governing authorities.

Paul goes on to state that those in positions of authority are appointed by God and are meant to serve the well-being of society. They are seen as God's servants, entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining order, promoting justice, and punishing wrongdoers. The reference to the sword implies that rulers have the authority to enforce the law and administer appropriate punishment when necessary.

Overall, this passage encourages Christians to respect and obey the civil authorities, recognizing their legitimate role in society. It also highlights the idea that those in positions of authority are accountable to God for their actions and should carry out their duties justly and responsibly.

Now, you might be thinking, what if the government commands me to do something against God and His revealed Word? Am I obligated, at that point, to submit to the government?

I would like to share with you a story from God’s Word to help us understand our responsibility.

Acts 5:14–42 ESV

¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵ so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. ¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” ²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵ And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” ²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” ³³ When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴ But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵ And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶ For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸ So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer

dishonor for the name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

This is a powerful example, from the Word of God, demonstrating there are times when the power or authority commands things that the Christian should not follow. In that case, don't follow what the governing authority says, follow what God says. However, realize they still carry the sword, and you will pay the price.

As an example, I must preach the word of God. This is my job. It's my glorious privilege. The Word of God is strong and truthful and can even be offensive. The sermons I preach go out on the world wide web each week. It is only a matter of time before I will get accused of propagating hate and will be ordered to stop by the governing authorities.

Yet, God's word says,

2 Timothy 4:1–2 ESV

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

So, I will preach the Word of God with love and compassion, trusting the Lord with the outcome. I am just a mouthpiece.

Warning - Be certain what you are willing to be punished for is actually important to God.

Preaching God's Word is important to God

Preaching whether you should wear a mask during lockdown is not.

Sometimes we conflate our American freedoms with God's gospel, and the things that are important to him.

Just remember this, read the Bible and see what God was willing to allow His children to go through in this life for the gospel...

Hebrews 11:32–38 (NIV)

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

Be wiser as serpents and gentle as doves with this stuff my friends.

Review - Submission to Authority Shows Your Trust in God's Sovereignty

- a. Resisting Authority is Resisting God
- b. Recognizing Authority's Responsibility Aids in Submitting to It

3. Submitting to Authority Keeps Your Conscience Clear (vs. 5-7)

Romans 13:5–7 ESV

⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ 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.

In these verses, the apostle Paul further elaborates on the relationship between Christians and civil authorities, emphasizing the importance of submission and obedience. Paul begins by stating that it is necessary for believers to submit to the authorities, not only out of fear of punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This means that Christians are called to recognize the authority of the governing powers and willingly comply with their laws and regulations.

Paul then explains the reasons behind this submission. He notes that the authorities are God's servants, who have been appointed to fulfill their governing roles. As such, they devote their time and efforts to the task of governing and maintaining order in society. Therefore, paying taxes and giving what is due to the authorities, such as respect and honor, is seen as a way of recognizing their God-given authority and fulfilling one's obligations as a responsible citizen.

This passage encourages Christians to submit to and obey the governing authorities, not only to avoid punishment but also as a matter of conscience. It emphasizes that the authorities have been established by God and should be respected as His servants. Christians are also encouraged to fulfill their financial obligations, such as paying taxes, and to show proper respect and honor to those in positions of authority.

How much is your integrity worth? Lets say you decide to cheat on your taxes because the Government just wastes money anyway, and so by cheating, you are able to save \$2000 in taxes. You now have your answer. Your integrity is worth \$2000. You sold your integrity for \$2000.

But as a follower of Christ, we must never sell our integrity. Because our integrity is based on our relationship with Christ. You represent Christ!

We must be a people who have a clear conscience. Who purpose to do right even when it hurts.

Psalm 15 ESV

A PSALM OF DAVID. ¹ O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; ⁴ in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; ⁵ who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

This is the kind of character we must possess as followers of Jesus. Because this is the character of Jesus.

These verses are summarized in [Luke 9:23](#) *“And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

Are you someone who walks with integrity? Are you someone who has no cracks in their foundation of truth? Or are you a person who is more concerned with getting the benefit of the here and now and will sell out your integrity for the temporary?

Review - Submission to Authority Shows Your Trust in God’s Sovereignty

- a. Resisting Authority is Resisting God
- b. Recognizing Authority’s Responsibility Aids in Submitting to It
- c. Submitting to Authority Keeps Your Conscience Clear

Conclusion:

[Romans 13:1-7](#) reminds us how crucial it is to submit to the authorities and be responsible citizens. We've talked about how this submission comes from our trust in God's control and His decision to put those in charge.

When we recognize and respect the authorities that God has set up, we show our obedience to Him and our desire to live according to His plan. It's not about mindlessly following rules, but about choosing to honor God and contribute to the well-being of our society.

Paying our taxes, fulfilling our financial obligations, and treating those in authority with respect and honor demonstrate integrity and good stewardship, which are important values to God. Our actions in these areas not only reflect our faith, but they also have the power to influence and inspire others.

In a world that often prioritizes rebellion and self-interest, our commitment to submitting to authority becomes a strong testimony of our trust in God's guidance and our willingness to live as His representatives. Through our obedience, we can show others the transformative power of the Gospel.

So let's leave this place striving to be model citizens, honoring God by submitting, being responsible with our resources, and treating authority with respect. Let's pray for wisdom, discernment, and the strength to live out these principles in our everyday lives.

Remember, our ultimate allegiance is to God alone. He is the source of all authority, and in Him, we find our true identity and purpose. Let His grace empower us as we navigate our roles as citizens, always seeking to bring glory to His name and reflect His love in everything we do.

As we submit to the governing authorities, let's keep in mind that our lives should shine with the light of Christ as we faithfully serve Him and make a godly impact on our world.