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**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: The Christian's Responsibility to the State**

**Transcribed Message**  
**May 14, 2023**  
**Romans 13:5-7**

I came across what I thought was a rather thought-provoking question recently. I'm going to share it with you and ask you to think about it as well. It simply asks this. Is there anything about being an American that makes it more difficult to live the Christian life? Is there anything about being an American that makes it more difficult to live the Christian life? I mean here we are. We live in the greatest land in the world far as I'm concerned. I know other people from other countries believe that about their country, but that's what I believe about our country. Great freedom. Great blessing. Amazing prosperity. All of these things that we enjoy every day of our lives. When you think of that in light of this question, how do those things impact the goals that we have established for our life, the priorities that we have for our life, the expectations for what we think this life should allow us to have and to enjoy. How do those things in fact impact our walk with God? We can't ask the apostle Paul to answer that question because Paul was a citizen of Rome. He certainly had certain privileges but he also had some significant hardships living in that context as well. This is what the apostle Paul can do. He may not be able to tell us whether there are things about being a Christian living in America that impact our walk with God, but he can tell us how it is that our walk with God is supposed to impact our citizenship. Let's do that.

Let's go to Romans 13 again this morning. We'll look at verses 5 through 7. We want to see that cultivating an attitude of respect and honor for our leadership is one of the ways we as Christians can show that Jesus is still doing this transforming work in our lives. Let's just do a quick review of Romans 13:1-4. Four things that we have seen. We've looked at these over the last weeks together, the first one being that all authority is derived from God. All authority. That is as comprehensive as it can be stated. There isn't any authority outside of the authority that God has established. That blanket

statement is going to inform everything else that Paul is going to say in these next verses.

The next thing he says to us is submission to government is to happen in every context. Paul is living out his life underneath a dictatorship. A dictatorship that is frankly going to turn to be a very brutal dictatorship in six or seven years from the writing of this book. The Christians who initially received this letter would in a matter of just a few short years find themselves living in a very brutal and oppressive situation. But the same word applies. It is today the same as it was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Every context that we find ourselves in, God calls on His people to walk in submission to the God-ordained authority because there is no authority except what God has established.

Thirdly, we disobey only when the government takes the place of God. Only when it takes the place of God. There are exceptions to that statement of submitting to those in authority over us. Those exceptions as you read again the Bible as we did a few weeks ago and looking at those exceptions see in the overall storyline of God's people to be rather rare. But there are instances where Peter and John and others had to say no, we can't do that. We have to obey God rather than obeying man. There are those instances.

I think the fourth thing that we remind ourselves of is we are predisposed towards rebellion. We do we need to guard our heart. We need to guard our heart. The natural bend of our fallen human nature is bent towards rebellion. We're always going to be in some sense fighting against that authority. We naturally do that in every area of life. So here is a good reminder to us.

I think that last point informs us as we go into the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter and it really is laid out for us as we've seen in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter when Paul says don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. We need humility. If you're going to walk in submission and you're going to walk in obedience and you're going to keep that predisposed heart of rebellion from going that way, you will need a heart of humility. We're going to have to work and we'll have to walk in self-denial. Our world screams at us every day. Demand your rights. You deserve better. All of those phrases that our world speaks to us. Paul is saying to us no, you adopt a mindset and mentality of self-denial. Then, as we closed out that 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, it was trust in God. Trust in God in all of those things.

Then we come this morning to verses 5 through 7. What is it that God requires of Christian citizens? Let's do what we did a couple weeks ago. Let's just go back and look at the flow of this passage this morning doing that with verses 5 through 7. But let's just go back and remember verse 1, this main command that we've already said. Submit. Let every soul, let every person ... I think Paul is including every citizen, believers and unbelievers. He is saying it's better, always better for there to be a government and for there to be a submission to that authority. The reason is, as we've said, is because God is the ultimate authority.

Now we jump in to our verses. We begin verse 5 and we're going to begin it and we're going to see out of that that there is an inference. That begins at the very front of verse 5 when he starts off that verse with "therefore". We're going to see what that "therefore" is there for. Then there are two purposes that he is going to put before us. Two purposes. One of them to avoid the wrath of the government. The other is that we would operate out of a clear conscience. From that there is an explanation. That explanation is going to sound a lot like the words of Jesus when He was asked about taxation and about government. He said render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. There's going to be a very clear connection to the words of Jesus in that explanation. And the reason at the end of verse six is going to surprise us. We'll hold off on that but I think we'll be surprised when he gives us the reason for doing what we're called upon to do. Then verse 7 ends with an inference and again gives us the command to give what you owe.

The three mandates for the Christian citizen. Remember. Government is called upon by God to restrain evil. Government is to be a servant of good. Government is to be God's temporal avenger. Those are the three things that Paul said. That's what government's responsibility is to its citizenry.

Now we're looking back and we're looking from the standpoint of the citizen's responsibility to government. Paul starts off with verse 5 and he says let me say it again. Submit to those in authority." Verse five. "Therefore, one must be in subjection not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." So let me say it again, Paul says. Let me review it one more time. Submit to those in authority. He says basically this. If you have to submit to those in authority out of fear, then do it out of fear.

That is really what he says at the beginning of that 5<sup>th</sup> verse. Therefore, one must be in subjection not only to avoid God's wrath. The “therefore” flows right out of verse 4. He just said in verse 4 the government does not bear the sword in vain. He comes to verse 5 and he says you need to submit again to those in authority over you because they do not bear the sword in vain.

Back in the day, and I suppose it's still true to some extent, but back in the day and some of you will relate to this better than others when the Bible says children obey your parents. Back in the day, back in the old days when some of us grew up, you obeyed your parents on some level or at least one of your parents in some measure out of a sense of fear because you knew to disobey was going to result in some serious consequences. Can anybody relate to that? Maybe it was your dad. Maybe it was your mom. It is sometimes surprising which of the children would choose to have discipline appropriated by their mom or their dad. In my case, it would've been my dad. In my 18 years of being under my parents' authority, I don't think I talked back to my dad once. I don't remember ever doing that because I think if I had I would still remember the consequences of having done that. Sadly, and I repent of this, but sadly on this Mother's Day I say I did that to my mom way too much. I think what Paul would say. I'm not suggesting child-abuse. I'm not suggesting discipline that causes children to be fearful in a bad way. But I think Paul would say if you have to obey your parents because you're a little bit afraid of the consequences of disobeying, it's okay. Obey them if that's the level at which you have to function and operate. That's okay. That I think is what he is saying here.

I want you to see the work of the translator in this 4<sup>th</sup> verse. Look at the choices that the translator makes as we work through this verse. The New American Standard Bible, some of you might have the Christian Standard Bible is the same way. That phrase is translated not only because of wrath. Submit not only because of wrath. A more interpretive phrase is the New International Version. If you have a New International Version, it says not only because of possible punishment. The NET Bible, the New English translation, and the ESV that I'm reading out of takes us right to the source of that wrath. The NET Bible says because of the wrath of the authorities. Then the ESV says not only to avoid God's wrath. See how the translators work through that

phrase? They all acknowledge that there is a wrath. You submit to those in authority. Your responsibility as a Christian citizen is in part to submit because of the potential of punishment, of wrath. Then the NIV says a possible punishment, so they take the word wrath and bring it to possible punishment. The NET Bible says it's the authorities that are going to do that. The ESV says not only to avoid God's wrath. They bring us to understand what Paul says at the very beginning. There is no authority except it has been constituted by God.

When Paul comes in verse 5, he can say submit again to your government. Let me say it again. Submit to those in authority over you because ultimately if there has to be a punishment you need to see that punishment as actually having its source in God because He's the authority behind all authority. Look at what he adds at the end of that verse: "But also for the sake of conscience." But also for the sake of conscience. As an example, you're driving down the road. You stay within the speed limit because you see that there's an officer sitting off to the side conducting a radar situation, and you know that if you're speeding very likely you'll be pulled over. Out of a sense of fear you stay within the speed limit.

But now look what he says. There's another reason to drive within the speed limit. I don't like this one any more than you do. There's another reason. It is so that we have a clear conscience. You say I'm way past that. Better yet, he says, do it so that you have a clear conscience. This, my friends, is no small matter. This is a big deal. This is a big deal. You go from pragmatism. A fear of being caught. A fear of punishment. That's basically what that first part of it is. Submit to those in authority over you. why? because if you don't there's going to be a consequence and that consequence might not be good. That is a very pragmatic answer. I'm going to obey because I'm afraid that if I disobey and get caught there's going to be something bad. Okay. He says if that's the only reason you've got, then do it.

But then he takes it to another level. In fact, he takes it to the highest level possible. He says no, obey so that you can walk before God and have a clear conscience. That's what he says in the next part. This is the transformation of Romans 12:1-2. We're not being conformed to the world but we're being transformed by the renewing of our mind. That's what he is pointing us to here. Listen. Righteousness,

Christ-likeness, godliness is way more than obedience, just so you don't get caught doing something that you're not supposed to. That's called performance. If the only reason you're obeying in any context in any situation, if the only reason that you're obeying is so that you don't get caught, then you're living a performative Christian life. You're just being a man pleaser. You're just doing what you're doing to look good before other people. Paul is taking it to another whole level. He is saying no, there's much more. We're to obey, we're to submit to government because it's the right thing to do, because God has commanded us to do this. We're not just governed by an external law. We're governed by an internal law and that internal law is our conscience. Do what is right because it's right.

The word "conscience" appears 25 times in the New Testament. The apostle Paul accounts for 20 of the 25. He is basically saying to us here this is the higher calling, the higher reason. Let me just give you some of these examples. In 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 5 this is what he says about the conscience: "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." We're to have a good conscience. Drop down to verse 19 and he says, "Holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this some have made a shipwreck of their faith." You go against your conscience, you go against what the Holy Spirit is saying to you in that inner voice of your conscience, you're headed, Paul says, for shipwreck. You can't do that. There is a witness of God's Spirit in that way. He says over in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter that deacons are to have a good conscience before God. Here clearly Paul calls us to a higher calling.

I want to apply this to something that we've already talked about in these past weeks. Look at this. When we disagree or even when we disobey government, it's based on a conscience that is informed by the word of God. That's what we saw in every one of those examples in the Old Testament all the way into the New Testament. When God's people stood up before the authorities and said we can't do that, it wasn't on a whim. It wasn't on some particular philosophic or ideological view that they had of something. It was on the basis of a conscience that had been informed by the word of God. That's the value, that's the necessity of Romans 12:1-2. If your mind is not being

transformed by the word of God, your conscience is not being strengthened by that which is right and good and pure and true.

Our conscience can be seared. Our conscience can be hardened. Our conscience can be made null and void. The one thing that will never allow that to happen is the word of God coming into our life, our heart, our mind on a daily basis and the Holy Spirit bearing witness in our conscience to that which is right and good and true and pure. That's what he says here. This is my point. When we stand up and say I can't do that to the government, we're doing it based on a conscience that has been informed by the word of God that tells us the government is stepping into the place that is reserved for God alone. That's what we saw in all of those examples. Whatever God's word prohibits, our conscience prohibits. Whatever God's word commands, our conscience commands. That's what it calls us to.

I see that cutting both ways. I see that first of all in terms of our conscience calling us to obey our government. That is the way Paul starts off. First responsibility of the citizenry to its government. Submit to those in authority over you out of a good conscience. That's one way this cuts, but here's the other way this cuts. It also cuts that our conscience calls us to speak out against the government in certain situations. There isn't anything that we have said in our Romans 13 study, as disturbing as maybe some of those things were, there isn't anything that I have said in any of our previous lessons from Romans 13 that in any way contradicts what we're talking about right here. When we talk about what it is that Paul has called us to in terms of our responsibility to government, how all government is established by God, there is no authority except behind that authority is God, that God is the one who raises up kings and presidents and dictators and all of the rest, and He's the one who brings them down, and all the principles that flowed out of that. But listen. When we come to this, we are saying that there is a time and there is a place when we cannot afford not to speak out. That's what he is saying to us here.

He's saying to us here that there are those situations in which we must give voice to what our conscience is saying. We are living increasingly in a culture that is counter to the word of God, to the truth of God, that is hostile to the things of God. I don't need to tell you that. You live in that world every day with me. It's happening increasingly. I

believe what we are called to is not silence. When we talk about submission to government, we're not talking about acquiescence. We're not talking about remaining silent in the face of injustice or unrighteousness. Martin Luther King Jr. said it this way: "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state and never its tool." It is out of an enlightened conscience informed by the word of God that we have to speak and say to our culture truths.

Marriage is defined by God as between one man and one woman. Everything else is so-called marriage. Marriage is not a social construct. We do not get to come along and define it in any way we want. It is one man and one woman. Genesis says that God created them. He created them male and He created them female. He created them in a binary way. there is either male or there is female. We have to find the courage to speak into a culture out of a conscience informed by the word of God that says the deception that the enemy is perpetrating on this current generation has to be spoken against. There's nothing but delusion and heartache and pain at the end of that journey. Every cell of your body cries out that you have been created in the image of God either as a man or a woman. You're not a man trapped in a woman's body and you're not a woman trapped in a man's body. You are who God created you to be.

Listen. There's a lot of challenges in that arena but Christians dare not be silent when they're called upon to speak out of an informed conscience by means of the word of God. We have to do it lovingly. We have to do it graciously. We have to do it kindly. But we have to do it. In my opinion, it's a deception to refer to somebody by pronouns other than the way God created them. I just don't think that's a faithful witness to the gospel that they desperately need.

It's the Bible that says God created in the womb of that mother a little baby, a human being. we cry out on the basis of the sanctity of life in that womb and we say no, our conscience is informed by the word of God that this is a child. It can't be simply viewed as an appendage to a mother that she could do anything she wants with it. It's deeply troubling what's happening in state after state in which they are basically saying a woman has the right to do whatever she wants with that child up to the exact moment of birth and in some cases after birth. This is the world that we live in. This is the world



that we are to submit to our government in, but our conscience requires us to not be silent in the face of what's going on. We're to love our neighbor as we already love ourselves. We'll see a little bit more of that Lord willing next week. We're also to see injustice. Who should be more concerned about injustice than believers than Christ followers? We can't be silent in the face of injustice. When other human beings are having their very lives viewed differently because of whatever circumstance they may find themselves in, we're the ones who need to speak up and speak out and not be silent. The list goes on and on, doesn't it, my friends.

But here's the point. Everything that we've said so far in Romans 13, what we are looking at here still requires us to work as hard as we can to shape the moral fabric and character of our nation. That is without question. I think Paul would say to those of us who live in a democratic republic, go vote. Vote every chance you get. If that's a privilege that you're given, go vote. Stop talking about there isn't anybody worthy of your vote. Look at the issues as best you can and pick somebody and vote to do all that you can to determine the moral fabric and fiber of our country. That's what he is saying to us. First of all, we are then to be those who submit but we're not going to be silent in the face of evil.

Second mandate. Let me get more specific, he says. Pay your taxes. You knew he would get to this. Look at verse 6: "For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing." The principle is repeated. This principle of paying your taxes doesn't occur for the first time right here in Romans. I have already referenced the fact that Jesus when He was asked and they tried to put on the horn of that dilemma He said no, you render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and you give to God the things that are God's. Paul's doing the very same thing here. These might be the least liked words of Jesus and Paul to all of us. Pay your taxes. What is required of Christian citizenry? Submit to government and pay your taxes.

Listen. Rome was an oppressive taxing state. It was oppressive. We know that from history. There were all kinds of ways the tax collectors tried to take advantage of people and get even more than Rome required of them. Don't you find it ironic, maybe even a little bit humorous that Jesus picked a tax collector to be one of the 12? Out of all the choices that he could've had, he picked a tax collector. Here we are, not unlike

Paul. Taxes were high. They were going to support things that Paul certainly did not agree with. What did Paul say? Pay your taxes. Paul, I don't like what they're doing with them. Pay your taxes. You submit. Pay your taxes.

Now look what he says. Tax collectors like you've never thought of them before. Are you ready for this? Here we go. Verse 4: "for he is God's servant." Singular. It's talking no doubt about the Emperor, about Nero in this context. He is referencing the lead guy. Now when you come to verse 6 he says "for because of this you also pay taxes for the authorities ...". Now it's plural. It's everybody else. It is all of the other people who are ministers of God. These tax collectors. Have you ever thought of your IRS agent as a minister of God? Next time you have your audit just make a reference – sir, or ma'am, I just want to thank you for being a minister of God on my behalf. I don't know if that will go well or not. That's what Paul says.

Here is a new way to look at the tax collectors, and he reinforces the metaphor by saying they are doing a sacred activity. "For the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing." See that word "attending"? The word "attending" is the same word used of a priest at the altar carrying out the priestly service. Paul didn't just slide by this. He is reinforcing it. These are to be viewed as the ministers of God. All those in authority over us, including those who collect taxes, are to be viewed as ministers of God. They're doing a sacred activity.

Now he surely does not mean that every government worker, every politician goes to work every day seeking to do the will and purpose of God. He knows that's not the case. He knew that was not the case in his day. But what he is saying is behind their activity, they are actually furthering God's agenda. They are actually carrying out God's purposes. That's the point that he would make here.

This is the summary for me. There is something more important than taxes and it's the authority behind those taxes. There's something more important than paying your taxes and it is to realize that behind those government officials is the God who has raised them up. I think that's what Paul wants us to see and understand here and to take away. So first of all we submit. Secondly, pay taxes. Thirdly, we can summarize it for you. Have a general spirit of compliance. Verse 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.” What is the opposite of compliance? It's a word that rhymes and it starts with a D. Yes, defiance. The opposite of compliance is defiance. Don't tread on me. Don't tread on me. Paul says we are to have a general spirit of compliance. That compliance is seen in two very distinct ways.

First of all, it is seen in our actions. In this context, what are our actions that prove our compliance? We pay our taxes. We pay our taxes. One of the ways you show your compliance to the government is you pay your taxes. You are acting out that truth of compliance. I would suggest that is the easier of these two things that he puts before us. April 15 comes and we've got a requirement to pay our taxes. We send it in and we're obedient to the government. We file our taxes. That task is behind us and we're done. But notice the second thing he requires.

It is also seen in our attitude. It's also seen in our attitude. He lifts up two words here – respect and honor. You've gone too far, Paul. Do you think Paul had any trouble respecting Nero? Have you ever read any history from this time period of these emperors? There are things that secular historians have written about the emperors of Rome that I wouldn't be comfortable reading in a setting like this. I certainly would not want to do so with children. I wouldn't even want to do it in mixed company. Some of the behaviors, some of the immorality, some of the licentiousness and the debauchery of these 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman emperors would make even parts of our society and culture blush. Here's Paul. He knows full well. Do you think he doesn't know the stories that were going around about Nero and other leaders within the Roman government? Of course, he knew. The spirit of God says let it be seen in your actions and let it be seen in your attitude. You give respect and you give honor.

I think in part Paul is saying to us you look beyond the person and you look to the office that they hold. That office has been ordained of God. There is no authority except has been established by God. God certainly isn't putting His stamp of approval on every Emperor of Rome. But he is saying behind every Emperor of Rome there is the sovereign hand of God. The office that they are holding, their holding by God's will and purpose. I don't think Paul would go along with the idea of #Not My Caesar. #Not My President. #Not My Senator. #Not My Representative. If you have any of those on your car, you can go ahead and take them off this afternoon. I don't think he would have that.

Listen. We never adorn the gospel when we speak disparagingly about government leaders that God has put over us. We never adorn the gospel with that kind of attitude and those kinds of words. That's ultimately all we want. All we want to do is adorn the gospel. All we want to do is live life in such a way that we lift up the beauty of the gospel. Let's not detract from the gospel but just look at the beauty of the gospel. Cultivating an attitude of respect and honor for our leaders is one way we as Christians prove yet again that this transforming work that Paul speaks of in Romans 12 is having its effects.

What do we take away? Christians are to think differently. Christians are to talk differently. We're to act differently. We're to pay our taxes differently. We're to disagree differently. We're to engage differently. We're to live differently. Why? Because we're different. That's why. We're to live differently and do all of these other things differently because we are different. We're different because of the gospel.

Let's pray. Father God, we're so very thankful for this gospel that has come to us in the person of Christ. This gospel, this good news that says that Jesus came, that He lived a perfect life. He did it for me. He did it for every person in this room and every person listening. Lord, that we would know what it means to have our sins forgiven, that we would know what it means to have absolute certainty that when we die we spend all of eternity with You because You've gifted us with eternal life. It's not because of what we have done but because of what you have done for us. Lord God, let the beauty of that gospel resonate in hearts this morning. Father, if there is anyone listening who has never put their trust, their faith in Christ alone, may they simply acknowledge that they have sinned and failed and fallen short of God's glory. Holy Spirit of God, open their eyes. Give them faith to believe and to trust that what Jesus said about Himself and what He has done is absolutely true and can be depended upon for this life and the life to come. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.