

Romans: Unashamed; the righteous shall live by faith

Romans 13:1-7 prt 36

MPS Submit to Governing Authorities

OPEN

Nero was one of the cruelest emperors to ever govern Rome. We have learned much about him by the Roman historian Tacitus.

He killed his mother, who schemed to have him become emperor in the first place, strangled his first wife to death, and kicked his second wife, while pregnant, killing her also.

Nero's appetite for grandeur while Rome suffered in many ways is bad enough, but it is thought that he set fire to a part of the city to destroy it so that he could build a bigger, more lavish palace – then blamed the Christians for the fire.

He hated followers of Jesus and the church – Tacitus writes that he would often impale Christians at the stake, cover them in pitch, and set them on fire to light his gardens during his lavish parties

He would have Christians arrested and executed in the cruelest way by sewing them into animal skin or wrapping them in meat only to be thrown helplessly into an arena, as spectacles, the crowds cheering as wild animals like bears, lions or dogs tore them to pieces.

Nero's reign over Rome was from 54AD – 68AD. Paul wrote the letter to the Romans around 57AD – meaning Nero was the governing authority Paul was speaking about in this letter. Ironically, it was under Nero's reign and most likely by Nero's orders that Paul was executed.

We don't have a governing authority like this, lording over us today. It is because of Christianity that we have such a civil and just government in the US.

MPS: Submit to Governing Authorities

- **There is no problem with the clarity of this passage – the problem lies in what we do with it.**
- Let me also make mention before we get into it, this text does not answer all of our questions related to the state.
- Paul is trying to stay on the gospel road without getting into either of the two ditches
- Paul is trying to avoid the “ignore Caesar” or “fight Caesar” positions.

- To the church in another Roman city, Philippians, he told them they were citizens of Heaven. It's the kingdom of God talk.
- Now, with the church in Rome it's, 'how do I live in Christ as I live in Rome'
- For us, it is how do we as citizens of the kingdom of God, in Christ, live in Albany... in the US?
- Let's attempt to answer three questions this morning as we exposit these verses. What are governing authorities, why submit to them, and how do we submit to them?

1. What are governing authorities? God's common grace designed to provide justice, order, and civility

1a *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities*

- "Authorities" refers to any person that represents the authority of the state: from local bureaucrats all the way up (e.g., emperor, prime minister, president).
- To "submit" (or "be subject," ESV) is broader than "obey." It conveys the idea of standing under the government in recognition that this is how God has ordered the world.

Titus 3:1 (ESV) *1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,*

1 Peter 2:13–17 (ESV) *13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

- Government is one expression of God's common grace; it is here for our good. It is designed to provide justice, order, and civility.
- Most of us don't like submitting to any authority... at one level, our country came into being by rebelling against authority. Just ask our British friends
- If we are honest, it's difficult for some to submit to God, now Paul is saying submit to governing authorities (Because God put them in place)
- Is this always true all the time? Aren't there times when we shouldn't submit to governing authorities?

Acts 5:29 (ESV) 29 *"We must obey God rather than men.*

- We are to engage in civil disobedience when the government prohibits us from doing what the Lord commands or when it commands us to do what the Lord prohibits.
- Paul also knew redemptive history. The Bible clearly teaches that God is sovereign over the authorities (Ps 75:7; Isa 40:23–24; 45:1–7; Dan 2:21; John 19:11).
- Paul's heritage also taught him that evil rulers must be resisted at times (Exod 1:17, 21; Dan 3:12–18; Heb 11:23).
 - Daniel's lion den or the 3 Hebrews not bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar
 - Midwives in Egypt
 - Yet he still penned these words about submitting to the governing authorities.

Bonhoeffer: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor under Hitler's regime, faced a choice: submit to a government demanding worship of its evil or obey God. He chose God. Bonhoeffer defied the Nazis by preaching truth, hiding Jews, and joining a plot to kill Hitler. His faith led him to prison and, in 1945, to the gallows—yet he stood firm. Like Daniel or the midwives in Exodus, Bonhoeffer shows us that when rulers demand what God forbids, we must obey the higher authority: the Lord.

What are governing authorities? God's common grace designed to provide justice, order, and civility (though obedience to God supersedes that of the state)

2. Why submit to governing authorities? God has sovereignly put them in place to serve His purposes.

Vs 1b-2 *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.*

- God chooses governments

John 19:10–11 (ESV) 10 *So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" 11 Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."*

- How do you live as God's people in a pagan world, in a world that is ran by many unqualified, incompetent leaders, that's not a new question. Christians have had to deal

with this for centuries, and here's the deal, the church continues to march on because there is no government where the gospel doesn't work. The gospel has worked in a monarchy, in a democracy, in a republic, in an oligarchy, in a dictatorship and many other places. There are no closed countries to Jesus, the Holy Spirit's not nervous saying, what do we do about the Muslims?

- The church got started in a Greco Roman world, which was a world ran by tyrants. And so let's let's not fear and let's not freak out
- Unfortunately, many Christians cannot see past the earthly government to the government of God. They do not trust in the providence of God. Many professing Christians essentially lose their minds when it comes to politics. They fail to see the God who is over the government. Should we engage in the political process? Yes, of course. Speak truth to power? Yes, when possible. But freak out or make an idol out of a party or a system? No way.

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,*

Jeremiah 29:4–7 (ESV) **4** *“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ... 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

- Paul didn't say go fight Nero, but go do good. Neither did he say, don't do anything, but do do good.

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. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.*

- Servant – *diakonos* Where we get our English word, Deacon, from.

Proverbs 21:1 (ESV) **1** *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*

- Sometimes Governments are blessings to the people, and sometimes a judgment to the people.

Habakkuk 1:5–6 (NIV) **5** *“Look at the nations and watch— and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. 6 I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole*

earth to seize dwellings not their own.12 You, LORD, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish.

Why submit to governing authorities? God has sovereignly put them in place to serve His purposes.

3. How do we submit to governing authorities? By honoring what God has sovereignly put in place

Vs 6-7 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.

- Tacitus writes about a time early in Nero's reign where a dispute arose around taxes. The way Rome collected taxes was by having collectors go out to attain them from people. Most were corrupt and abusive – they made people overpay and got rich over it. The outrage was so large that Nero pulled back on how taxes were collected.
- There must have been talk amidst the Roman church about whether to pay taxes or not... or at least how to reduce what they 'owed.'
- Ministers here is the same word for those serving in the temple. It is strong language; civic leaders are serving God's purposes.
- In Rome the way to stay under the radar as a marginalized group (which Christians were) was to live honorably, not rebelliously
 - Pay Taxes
 - Give Respect
 - Give Honor
- Paul preached the gospel to Felix and Agrippa, but he respected them as leaders (Acts 24–26)

How do we submit to governing authorities? By honoring what God has sovereignly put in place

APPLICATION:

- Submit to governing authorities, acknowledging God's design for them, and thank God for all the good that is done through them.
- Pray for those in leadership (1 Tim 2:1–4). Avoid being the kind of Christian who spends more time criticizing than praying.

- Be a good citizen. Pay taxes. Obey the law. Be respectful. Pour yourself out for the needy. Live with a clear conscience before God. Serve your city and country for the common good.
- Engage the political process with truth and justice and the common good in mind. If you are a civil leader, lead with biblical values (Prov 8:15; 16:10, 12; 29:4; 31:8–9) and bring your convictions into the public arena (Prov 14:34).
- Rest in the providence of God. Calm down. God is sovereign. No matter the circumstances, our testimony is “Our God reigns.”
- Make your ultimate allegiance to King Jesus. Danny Akin says it well: “So, as a devoted follower of Jesus, I will say ‘yes’ to obeying the government and paying taxes to Caesar, but I will say ‘no’ to disobeying the Word of God and worshiping a man or institution. Independence Day for the Christian is not marked by a flag. No, our independence day is Easter, marked by a cross and an empty tomb”

CONCLUSION

- Remember, we are living in the ‘not yet’ kingdom. Though Jesus has done everything to bring the kingdom of God to us now (Already), we still have to live in this world with sin, heartache, pain, and suffering.
- Jesus substitutionary death on the cross in our stead, His burial and resurrection have ushered in a new age and you can come into the kingdom trusting Him for forgiveness of sin and eternal life.
- Meanwhile, we can trust God is at work through governing agencies around the world to bring about all His heart desires and we can trust Him that He has our greatest good in mind... all leading up to the ‘not yet’ kingdom.
- Soon Jesus will establish a one-party kingdom, in which he will rule with perfect peace and justice forever. Kings and kingdoms fade away, but the kingdom of Christ endures forever.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

1. What are some ways you can submit to the governing authorities?
2. How does remembering, “Jesus will establish a one-party kingdom, in which he will rule with perfect peace and justice forever,” help you keep things in perspective?