

Romans 13:1-7

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[0:00] I do hope that you have a copy of God's Word with you this morning. Please join me in it in Romans chapter 13. Our text for today is Romans chapter 13 verses 1 through 7.

Before we take a look at today's text, a very good morning to you all. If I've yet to say hi to you, I'm very glad to be back with you, and I'm very thankful for our church.

I am grateful for our church for at least three reasons. First, I'm thankful for church leadership that cares about my spiritual and physical well-being.

Truly, the men that God is leading this church are a blessing to you as well as to myself. Secondly, I'm thankful for a church that is willing to let me be cared for, that allow me to be absent for a month and to ask how my time away was and how I am.

I'm just warmed by all of your appreciation and gratefulness for my time away this morning. Please know that that time was well spent and I'm doing quite well.

[1:11] Thirdly, Sam and I took the boys for a teaching opportunity to a local megachurch last week, and I am thankful for a church that does not desire to be entertained to death and will not allow for God's Word to be neglected when we are gathered together.

In a single verse of many of the songs that we've sung together this morning, there's more truth, substantive truth, than we experienced in our entire time at that church.

And so I'm glad that some of the things that they did, I would shudder to try, as I think you all would throw me out the window if I did. So I'm glad for that.

I am in no way tempted to entertain you, and I think this is good for all of our souls. If I ever have reason to doubt the power of the gospel or the goodness of God, I only need to stop and think about his manifold grace in the life of this church, and my faith is refreshed.

So thank you. Keep it up. And now as we turn our attention to the first seven verses of chapter 13, we find a timely text for a season of political unrest.

[2:35] I imagine that if you have no concern about the state of politics in our country, then you are paying no attention whatsoever to all that has been happening. Maybe that's a wonderful state of bliss.

These seven verses are good for us for today, but beyond the providential timing of their assignment to this morning, we will do well to think about their placement in Paul's letter to the Roman believers.

Many commentators suggest this passage is disjointed from Paul's exhortations in chapter 12. I even read a suggestion in my study of it that it was imported from elsewhere and brought into this book.

But this is not so. In Romans chapter 12, verse 1 and 2, Paul wrote this, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, right, in light of everything that he has presented to be true of the gospel so far, he says, by the mercies of God, which is the summary of those first 11 chapters, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

And we talked about how this was whole self-sacrifice that Paul is referring to here. Every ounce of who you are presented as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

[4:04] Verse 2, he says, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

And we talked about how Paul's not here meaning that if you will transform your mind, that you will be able to discern the unknown will of God. But he's going to go on to tell us what that will of God is. So he encourages at the outset of chapter 12 that our whole selves are to be given to God. And then the structure of the following chapters is chiasmatic.

If you're not familiar with this term, it means that the text mirrors on top of itself. There's many chiasmatic structures found in the Bible, and they are very cool.

So I want to draw your attention just briefly to this one. After verse 2 of chapter 12, we see in verses 3 through 8 a summary of humble service.

[5:07] Like how should our lives look in service to the church using our various gifts in the way they were designed to be used. And then in verses 9 through 16, he talks about love in the life of the church.

So you've got A, chapter 12, verses 3 through 8. B, verses 9 through 16. C, how it is that we're meant to relate with the world.

Verses 17 through 21. And then it follows, if we're to relate to the world in this way, how it is that we're to relate with the political authorities of this world.

So you see the C prime, the reflective part of that part found in verses 17 through 21. And then you continue on in chapter 13, verses 8 through 10.

And again, love in the church, right? Corresponding to verses 9 through 16 of chapter 12. And then all of chapter 14, again being about humble service.

[6:12] Now I'm looking at all this typed out, and I know that your mind is probably going, okay. The point is that there's a chiasmatic structure here. Paul has an ordered, divinely inspired plan, and we ought to give care as we consider it in the coming weeks.

Part of giving our whole selves in devotion to our merciful God is living under the authority that he has established in the home, at work, in church, and yes, even as citizens of the place that God has placed us.

So, without further ado, let's take a look at today's text. It is a joy, beloved, to remind you that this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good, and we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

Romans 13, beginning in verse 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.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

[7:35] Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval. 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. Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience.

For because of this, you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 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.

Now, in order to avoid chasing every possible rabbit this morning, we will begin with a simple three-point exegesis of the text, which will be as follows.

Number one, a command to obey. Number two, a caution against rebellion. Number three, a contribution. For the work.

[8:44] Now, after this straightforward consideration, I intend to ask some contextual questions and issue answers from this text, and more broadly from elsewhere in the Bible.

So we're going to just simply go through the text itself, and then we're going to ask some slightly larger questions as well. So hang in with me as we do that. So number one, a command to obey. And you see this there at the very beginning of the chapter, verse one, 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.

Paul tells us, simply, that we are to obey the governing authorities of our political system, because that authority has been set in place by God himself.

You may recall that I taught a series on authority in recent months and summarized the overarching teaching of the Bible with eight biblical assertions.

[9:45] I'm going to give them to you really quickly in brief, but hopefully this will be a reminder to you as we think about submission to authority. Number one, God's authority is innate.

That means it belongs to him because he is, in fact, God. Nobody granted it to him. He is in authority because he is God. And because of that, that authority is final.

It's the absolute authority. God's authority is innate and it is final. Number two, God's authority is necessarily good because he is good.

We have no reason to question the way that God has ordered the universe because God is a good God. Number three, humankind has an authority problem.

It began in the garden, continues to this day. Paul is here addressing it in these following verses.

We tend to not want to be told what to do. Number four, we are delegated authority that always has limits and is always subservient to the one who delegated it, right?

[10:56] That is God who has that innate and final authority. He's put boundaries on the authority that he has granted to various roles in our world. Number five, when a person or institution takes up a responsibility not granted to them or exercises an authority granted to them in a way not granted to them, it is at best ineffective.

It is at worst abusive. So we are meant to take up authority that's been granted in the way that it's been granted. Otherwise, it goes horribly awry.

Number six, the aim of exercising authority and submission to God's good authority is for the sake of protecting the vulnerable, strengthening our communities, and promoting human flourishing, which is borrowed from a book by a man named Jonathan Lehman called Authority.

So again, it's for the sake of protecting the vulnerable, strengthening our communities, and promoting human flourishing. Number seven, God delegates his authority through three institutions and six positions.

And we talked about those at length across that time. I'm going to spare you those details this morning. For our purposes, know that one of the three institutions is the government, which is what we are considering today.

[12:17] And lastly, within these three institutions and six positions, there is granted two types of authority. We talked about the authority of counsel or persuasion, the power to convince somebody to do something.

It's what we're doing here and now. I hope to convince you by the power of the Spirit that what Paul is exhorting us to is good and proper, and we should obey it.

And also, the authority of command or coercion, the power to make someone do something by force, which is the type of authority that the government possesses, right?

Yielding that sword mentioned in the text. So generally, Paul says, chapter 13 and verse 1, we are to recognize the governing authorities as being from God, and therefore, we are to obey them.

I know that when we read a text like this, we immediately want to arrive at the exceptions. We are, after all, citizens of a country born not so long ago from casting off government authority.

[13:29] That's kind of who we are as Americans, no longer British anymore. However, we recently celebrated Independence Day, a yearly recognition that we were unwilling to live under the tyranny of King George and still today won't stand for tyranny.

I'm not saying any of this is bad, right? But it's kind of part of who we are. We read a text like this and we want to go, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, but... But note that you generally, willingly subject yourself to the governing authorities in your daily living.

We are generally productive citizens, obeying traffic laws, keeping our licenses and insurance current, paying our property taxes, pulling permits for septic system installs, not dumping trash in the river, etc.

There are laws that we obey. Whether or not we entirely agree with them, we still submit to that authority because we recognize that it's an authority.

And if we do well, we recognize that it's an authority given by God. We generally find great accord with the rule of law and agree mostly with the laws of our land.

[14:47] That said, we don't always agree, do we? Until recently, a Supreme Court decision known as *Roe v. Wade* functionally served as the law of the land that permitted abortion, like the murder of unborn children.

Christians rightly despised and despised that decision and sought to see justice done. Not through vigilantism, but through political process.

We praise God for that decision's overturning and recognize that it is the starting point for much more work to defend the most vulnerable of our country's citizens.

So, we took up there as Christian people. We didn't become vigilantes. We weren't those that bombed abortion clinics, but rather we submitted ourselves to the authority and cried, this is wrong and must be fixed.

Praise God, we are in the process of that even now. The point I am making is that we ought not be quick to the American impulse to arrive at the exceptions, but rather to accept the general exhortation.

[16:03] Don't forget that this letter's original audience were Roman citizens. It is most likely that Paul wrote this letter in A.D. 57, a time at which the citizenry of Rome was already persecuting Christians with no protection from the pantheonic Roman leadership.

In just a few short years, in A.D. 64, the Roman authorities would begin the state-sponsored systematic persecution of Christians. Yet, Paul's inspired pen writes, We are not exceptional in the history of the world.

Like, we have some particular oppression that shouldn't make this text ring true for us. Think about first century and second and third and fourth century Christians.

Think about Christians in our world today that take up a text like this and read, 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.

So we have a command to obey. Secondly, Paul gives us a caution against rebellion. This is found in verses 2-5.

[17:24] Therefore, these authorities have been having instituted by God at the end of verse 1. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

He has such a confidence in God's sovereign working that these people in these positions were placed there by God. Generally speaking, if we resist them, then we are resisting God himself. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Do you want to not fear them? Well, then do what is good and you will receive his approval.

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 and avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be in subjection not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. Paul tells us in these verses generally, if you rebel against the governing authorities, then you rebel against God himself and will incur the temporal wrath of God in the consequences rendered for your rebellion.

[18:38] If you break a traffic law, you may find yourself paying a hefty fine is a simple and relatively benign example. If you disregard those authorities, you are going to have some trouble people.

The giving of law and the enforcement of it is a mercy to people. Generally speaking, it's a mercy to people.

The consequences given for breaking the Mosaic law had five expressed purposes. If you'd like to know references for these, I'll be happy to send them to you.

first, they served, again, these are the consequences for breaking the Mosaic law, this is in God's theocracy, they were a matter of justice, setting right a wrong in due proportion.

Somebody commits a wrong against you, they deserve some consequence for that action. They served as a deterrent to further crime. People who witnessed that there were consequences to

actions were less likely to commit those crimes.

[19:47] They were a leveler of impartiality. God's law was very careful to say that no one was above the rule of this law. fourthly, they were meant to be a swift matter of order that civility would be maintained in a society.

Fifth, they were a way of pardon, restoration, once the penalty was paid for a crime committed, a way for a person to be restored meaningfully to a community.

Our system does not function perfectly. I will not make a claim to that. I am sure that we can all share a story of mishandled justice, but the governing authorities get it right more times than not. There is justice administered at the hands of governing authorities. We ought to all be glad of the difficult work that does get done right.

It just doesn't get shared on social media. Robert Haldane in an exposition of Romans wrote this, the institution of civil government is a dispensation of mercy and its existence is so indispensable that the moment it ceases under one form, it reestablishes itself in another.

[21:13] So just as an example, in quote for a second, when all the crazy stuff was going on in Seattle and they took over blocks and they were being anarchists, they formed a government within the first week of doing that.

It was a failed experiment altogether, but they very quickly formed government because they saw what happened when there was no rule at all. Back to the quote.

The world ever since the fall when the dominion of one part of the human race over another was immediately introduced has been in such a state of corruption and depravity that without the powerful obstacle presented by civil government to the selfish and malignant passions of men, it would be better to live among the beasts of the forest than in human society.

We need restraining grace in our lives. As soon as its restraints are removed, man shows himself in his real character. When there was no king in Israel and everyone did that which was right in his own eyes, we see in the last three chapters of the book of Judges what were the dreadful consequences.

Mankind cannot be left in its depravity to itself. We need God to be merciful to us, to give us governing authorities, and we ought generally to obey those authorities and recognize them as a gift to our flourishing this side of glory.

[22:37] So that was the simple point number two from the text. Thirdly, and very shortly, a contribution for the work. And we see this in verses 6 and 7.

John MacArthur made an entire sermon out of this text, and I just don't want to talk about taxes that much. There Paul writes, For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing.

Pay to all who 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. Paul tells us in the last two verses of today's text that because governing authorities are instituted by God, that it is proper to contribute to the work that they do.

We'll have to do so with our finances, and we'll have to do so with our attitudes. We need to respect those positions of authority, whether we particularly respect the person or the work being accomplished within that role itself.

I want to read to you an anonymous second-century Christian's letter where he's describing the activity of his fellow Christian followers. Again, this is second-century.

[23:56] He writes this, Christians are distinguished from other men, neither by country nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a particular form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity.

The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men, nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines.

But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them had determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of

their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessively striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.

They marry, as do all others. They beget children, but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. [25:19] They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all.

They are unknown and condemned. They are put to death and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich. They are in lack of all things and yet abound in all.

They are dishonored, yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil, spoken of, and yet are justified. They are reviled and blessed.

They are insulted and replay the insult with honor. They do good, yet are punished as evildoers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life.

They are assailed by the Jews as foreigners and are persecuted by the Greeks, yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred. I just would ask the question, generally of American Christianity, is it defined in that way?

[26:27] And I think sadly, it's not. May we be people characterize the way these second century Christians were characterized.

So there's a simple exegesis of the text. A command to obey, a caution against rebellion, a contribution for the work. Now, however, I want to ask two contextual questions and issue some answers, at least in part, to those questions.

questions. The first is simply this. What part should Christians play in politics? Do we have any role to play at all? Should we entirely remove ourselves from the process, simply saying, well, God's going to do what God's going to do, so we have no reason to be involved in it?

I say to you, no, we have our system is a system by and for the people in its design, so let's participate meaningfully in it.

God has granted us such opportunity to work toward those previously mentioned goals of protecting the vulnerable, strengthening our communities, and promoting human flourishing as we participate in our political process.

[27:48] Politics are downstream of culture. So let's be those who have and hold God's truth, be shapers of culture and the politics that follow.

Let's not leave our pagan neighbors to themselves. Let's be involved. We have the opportunity to do so, and so we should in some specific ways.

Number one, let us vote for godly leaders and biblical laws. Your votes have consequences.

We have witnessed that most readily in these past years. Know what is good and true and beautiful. Have a biblical worldview and throw your citizenship at those things on the ballot.

We have a limited amount of political influence, but we do have this ability, each and every one of us who are of age. Know biblical justice and support laws consistent with it.

[28:54] Vote for leaders that have Bibles in their back pockets and not just special interest dollars. Sadly, there are few and far between, it would seem.

Perhaps consider, young people, a life of politics. We need good men and women to be involved in the political process. Remember that there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God, but God uses means to accomplish his ends.

And in our political system, that includes your voice and your vote. In our context, those means are not coups, we hope, we hope that's not the way political power transitions in our country, but rather ordered processes, and so we should be involved in those processes.

Secondly, specifically, being involved in politics, given the opportunity, we should warn leaders that they have been appointed by God, are meant to work for the good of their citizenry, by God's standard, and will be judged for the way they govern.

We should be a voice in the public sphere if we have the opportunity to speak to elected officials.

We should be saying to them, there is a standard by which you are meant to govern.

[30:18] I wonder how many opportunities to clearly present the gospel to governing authorities have been missed for the sake of political expedience or guised civility. We do well to be prophetic voices, to engage politically as Christians first, concerned about those eternal things most, and then as Americans second.

Thirdly, trust the Lord of politics and be charitable. Trust the Lord of politics. Nothing is outside of His control.

Regardless of the results of any given election, Christians should be confidently settled of all people. We should be the most confident of all people because we know that our Savior will never occupy the Oval Office, but presently occupies the throne of heaven and reigns over all.

Undoubtedly. Beloved, our ultimate citizenship is with Him. If you have turned from your sin and placed saving faith in the accomplished work of Christ for you, then you ought to be immovable. Your confidence should be unshakable. The author of Hebrews writes chapter 13 and verse 14, For here we have no lasting city, but wishes will not be thwarted, and although His providence can at times be strange to us, His sovereign goodness never fails to accomplish all that He purposes.

[31:57] Set your confidence beyond this world. Fix it heavenward and rest. Again, I'm not saying don't be involved, but in the midst of our involvement, and after our involvement has passed, we ought to be a people so confident in who our God is and what He has promised to accomplish on our behalf and in the world, that we are not given to fits like the world around us is.

people with unshakable confidence in God's providence find it easy, hear me, people with unshakable confidence in God's providence find it easy to be charitable towards those who disagree with them.

If someone doesn't think the way you think, vote the way you vote. If you're confident in God's sovereign goodness, you still may want to convince them otherwise, but the world does not rise and fall in your ability to convince them otherwise.

Even in matters of politics, we can be charitable if we're confident in who our God is. God is the world is not falling apart outside of God's control.

No matter how dire it may seem at times, God has not given up his sovereignty to anybody. Charles Spurgeon once said, this is the quotation on the back of your bulletin, in a quote often wrongly applied politically, he says this, I do not know which I should prefer to see one of my dear Christian brethren fall into doctrinal error or into an unchristian spirit.

[33:50] I would prefer neither for I think this is a safe rule of two evils choose neither. We can be doctrinally consistent, politically wise, and still be charitable towards others because we're confident in God's providential work.

second question and final question, when is it by our God to rebel against governing authorities? When is it faithful to rebel against governing authorities? Now, Paul doesn't give us any space for that in today's text, but he's speaking generally, I believe.

Surely governing authorities err at times, correct? They do, many times they do. At those times, that authority sets itself against the commands of God.

We see the case of this all around us. In Psalm chapter 2, verses 1 through 3, the psalmist writes, why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain?

[34:59] The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, that's God the Father, and against his anointed, that's God the Christ, saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

You can see here in this psalm that it perhaps is normative that governing authorities want to reject God himself.

What are we to do, God's people, when this is the case? Rebel. That's what we're to do. We're to rebel against that kind of stand against God because we stand with the innate and final authority. We can observe an example of this in the life of the apostles in Acts 5 27-29. I want you to note the issue that they stand for.

There we see, when the captain with the officers had brought them, this is the apostles, they set them before the council and the high priest questioned them, saying, we strictly charge you not to teach in this name, the name of Christ.

[36:06] Yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood. God upon us. So we have charged you not to preach the gospel and you did it anyway. These are governing authorities put in place by God.

What are they to do in this situation? So clearly, they rebelled. And Peter defends that action in verse 29, but Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men.

Now note at the core of this, the core of what's happening here is a rebellion against spiritual matters. You have the example of Paul causing a riot.

Paul doesn't go into a city in order to cause a riot. Paul goes into a city preaching against the idolatry there and a riot results. Rather, he sought to be peaceable as he went about his business. Again, from Spurgeon, Spurgeon says, there are points of inevitable contact between the higher and lower spheres. Points where politics persist in coming into collision with our faith.

[37:21] And there we shall be traitors both to heaven and earth if we consult our comfort by sinking into the rear. There are times that these things are going to run in opposition to one another and we are to be those that press forward.

We stand with the one who has that innate and final authority. Sometimes this rebellion is simple and it's clear.

Still difficult, still difficult to stand in the face of opposition. The sword is the threat, but simple and clear, sometimes it is much more complicated.

We found this to be true in the recent past as we consider the rules of governing authorities concerning our gathering as a church. Churches all over the nation had to consider this.

Were those rules proper for the good of the citizenry? Or would obeying them find us guilty of neglecting to meet together, which we are warned against in Hebrews chapter 10?

[38:25] What do we obey? Are we meant to subject ourselves to the governing authorities in this case, or to not neglect meeting together? Over here we have these two commands given to us, and how this question was answered was difficult to ascertain, and it developed over time as we had more information navigating that particular illness.

Difficult sometimes to sort through the proper thing to do. In 18th century America, pastors debated the validity of war against the crown, and whether the American experiment was sanctioned by God.

You can read the writing that went back and forth between the two. I'm not much of a student of history. I did receive a history minor. It was kind of a B student history minor, but I've read some of this writing.

It is interesting to see the way they debated between the two. An argument for justice, an argument to obey these kinds of commands we find in chapter 13.

I find myself trying to live in those days, trying to walk out the arguments between the two, and I must say that in the early days, I think I would have been aligned with the crown.

[39:48] I think the taxation without representation argument was a difficult one in light of these first seven chapters. But as the British government came into the Americas and seized land and did unjust things, I think I would have flipped on the matter.

I think I would have finally said, okay, now justice must be done. They have stepped too far. But there was this debate going on amongst faithful Christians trying to figure out how to navigate such a time.

We must give our whole selves to God and with humility, prayerfully seek his will in these more complicated matters. All the time, being patient with one another as we await our coming king.

I pray for us that we would be a people different than what we observe out there, right?

Distinguished by our love for one another, confident in who our God is, right?

Characterized by confidence in the ultimate authority, our generally good citizenship that people would look at us and say, they don't think the way I think and act the way I act, but it's difficult to

argue that they're not good for the place in which we live, and that we would also be characterized by our longing to see all things made new.

[41:13] Let's pray together to that end. Thank you.